Beyond the Basics

Sustaining a Neighborhood Networks Center After Start Up Success

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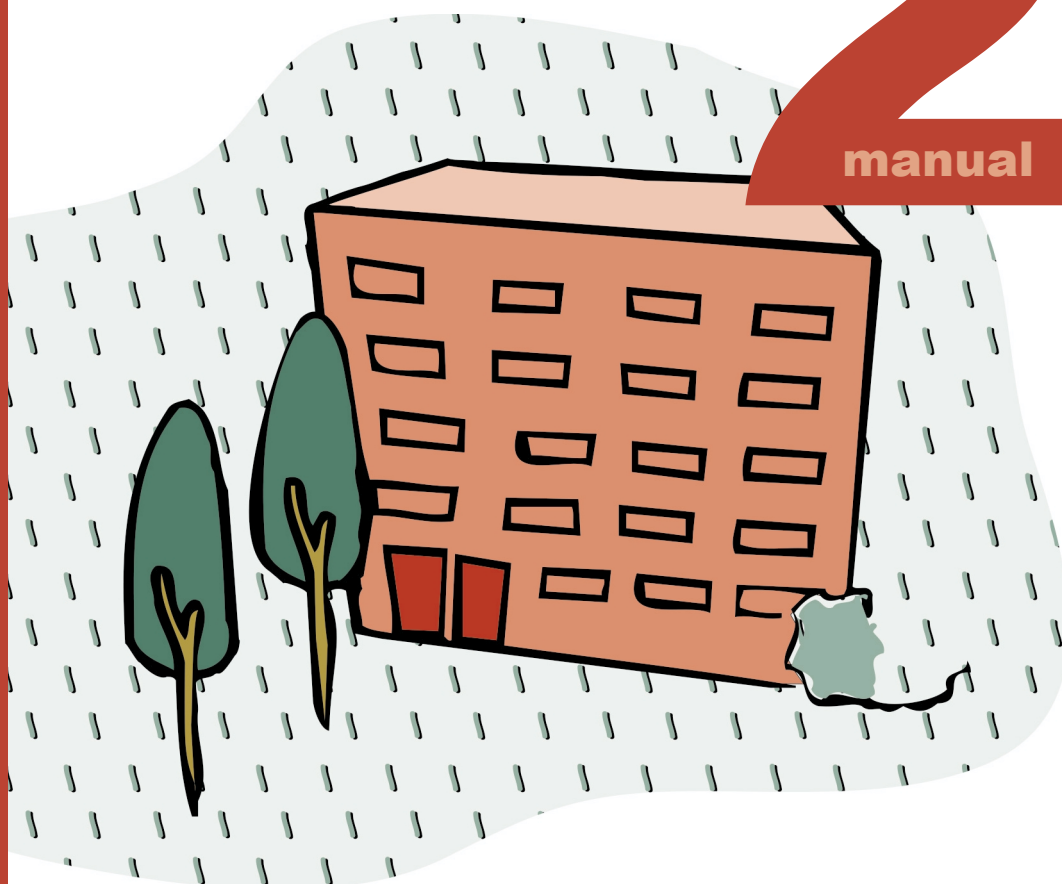
This publication was developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist in the planning and development of Neighborhood Networks centers.

The guides in this series offer "how to" information on starting up a center, creating programs and identifying center partners; marketing and media outreach; center and program profiles and a wealth of resources.

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1995. Since then, hundreds of centers have opened throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. These centers provide residents of HUD-assisted and/or -insured properties with programs, activities and training promoting economic self-sufficiency. These guides contain examples of successful center initiatives and how you can replicate them.

This guide was published in 2001.

To receive copies of this publication or any others in the series, contact:

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All publications are available from the Neighborhood Networks Web site at:

www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

EQUAL HOUSING
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Section 1: Introduction

The early days of your Neighborhood Networks center's organization seem like a distant memory. So much has occurred since then. Programs and services flourished and some may have floundered. The concept of partnership building may have experienced the same. Throughout the property your center serves, and the community, people have come to your center – perhaps more than any other community technology center – to find fulfilling programs and services that help them and their families.

And you took the advice in *Beyond the Basics: Sustaining a Neighborhood Networks Center's Start Up Success*. You approached the organizational development of your center as an astute businessperson, carefully assessing your market and responding with services to meet its demands. You also created a mission for your center to serve the residents of the property where your center is located and you implemented your mission with professionalism and humanity.

Your entrepreneurial spirit has paid off but now, you're no longer the new kid on the block.

Here's where Neighborhood Networks: *Beyond the Basics* can help propel your center.

Assessing programs, services, partnerships and staffing as the center moves forward requires different skills and knowledge. Evaluation continues to be strategic, and the value of the Neighborhood Networks START tool becomes more evident.

How to Use This Manual

Each chapter of the manual focuses on an important aspect of center operation. This introduction provides an overview of the national initiative and the roles of centers.

- *Section 2: Neighborhood Networks Annotated Resources* provides links to important resources on the Web that correspond to each of the remaining sections of this manual.
- *Section 3: Networking* gives centers the necessary information to evaluate their center's success in the community as well as leads to begin center-to-center mentoring and forming consortia.

- *Section 4: Forming a Strategic Plan and Making Business Decisions* describes the process of forming and using a strategic plan. This plan, as well as other important business decisions covered in this section are important first steps towards becoming a mature Neighborhood Networks center.
- *Section 5: Running a Sound Business* delves more into business decisions for a center that has advanced beyond the start-up stage. Topics such as an annual audit, the next steps in the 501(c)(3) process and staffing are covered.
- *Section 6: Assuring Successful Programs* outlines some potential programs that could be offered at a Neighborhood Networks center, provides guidance about how to decide the priorities for residents, and gives tips about several types of programs commonly offered at centers. This sections goes beyond Manual 1: *Open for Business* and suggests ways to maintain successful programs.
- *Section 7: Partnership Development* begins with an evaluation of the center's first year partners. From this evaluation, a center can determine which relationship to maintain and which new partners to recruit. This section also covers strategies for maintaining existing partners and developing complex relationships.
- *Section 8: Raising Funds To Sustain Your Center* describes strategies on how a mature center would secure more funding. This section lists funding resources for second year centers and beyond.
- *Section 9: Evaluating the Center for the Future* begins the evaluation process on year two. By using START, Neighborhood Networks centers can identify areas where reseeding is necessary and appropriate.

Each chapter focuses on another important aspect of center operation. Have questions? Feel free to call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at (888) 312-2743 and ask to speak to a technical assistance provider. Specially trained staff are available to help.

About Neighborhood Networks

Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that encourages the development of community technology centers in privately owned HUD-assisted and/or –insured housing. By catering to the needs of children, adults and seniors and by virtue of their convenient location, centers are helping residents gain access to critical services that help them obtain better jobs, improve their education and achieve a better quality of life for themselves and their families. It was established in 1995.

Neighborhood Networks Resources

Visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site for all of the information you will need for your center. From fundraising to childcare to new programs to START, the Web site has it all.

For general information:
http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org

For START:
http://www.hud.gov/nnw/startnewcenter/nnwbusiness.html

For all other Neighborhood Networks guides and toolkits:
http://www.hud.gov/nnw/nnwresources.html

From the outset, property owners and managers of HUD assisted and insured housing embraced the concept of creating technology centers that bring digital opportunity and lifelong learning to residents. In just two years, more than 200 Neighborhood Networks centers opened; between 1997 and 1999, the number more than doubled. By mid-2001, there were well over 800 centers.

Communities Prosper With Neighborhood Networks

By encouraging the creation of Neighborhood Networks centers in Multifamily properties, HUD is working to ensure that residents are given access to information technology and concomitant economic opportunities. Neighborhood Networks centers are proving to be important players in helping Americans – regardless of age, income, race, ethnicity, disability or geography – gain access to 21st century tools and skills.

Each Neighborhood Networks Center is Unique

An important aspect of the Neighborhood Networks initiative is that no two centers are alike. Residents, property owners and managers establish local centers that are tailored to the needs of their communities. Centers are locally driven.

Neighborhood Networks was intentionally designed to be easily replicable in any community. Centers are easy to replicate because they are not given programmatic parameters. While HUD provides technical assistance and limited funds to property owners, the specifics of programmatic development are left to center planners.

Typically, a Neighborhood Networks center is a room or series of rooms equipped with computers and located on site or near a HUD-assisted and/or – insured housing development.

Centers usually offer computer and Internet access, staff assistance and a range of training resources for residents. Center programs may include computer training, adult education and General Equivalency Diploma certification, after-school homework help, job readiness training, microenterprise development, health care information, and a variety of youth and adult social services.

To provide these programs and services, centers partner with businesses, government agencies, nonprofit, civic and faith-based organizations, and foundations which provide both cash and in-kind contributions. Centers are

Neighborhood Networks Services
A Neighborhood Networks center can provide:
❏ Computer access and training
❏ Job readiness programs and support
❏ General Equivalency Diploma classes
❏ Adult education classes
❏ Literacy programs
❏ Youth education and recreation programs
❏ Anti-drug and crime prevention programs
❏ Health and wellness activities
❏ Child care services
❏ Transportation
❏ Microenterprise development
❏ Social services

urged to become nonprofit organizations, which increases their opportunities for support.

So Many Stakeholders, So Many Beneficiaries

Residents, property owners and managers, community stakeholders and the community at large all benefit from having a Neighborhood Networks center helping promote individual self-sufficiency.

- ❑ Residents gain convenient access to programs and services that can help them improve job skills, expand their education and become economically self-sufficient.
- ❑ Property owners can experience lower vacancy rates, a stabilized tenancy, reduced crime and improved community pride.
- ❑ Local partners have access to a new pool of potential employees and additional sources of business. Local partners can also meet their commitment to philanthropy and receive positive publicity through their involvement with centers.
- ❑ Communities benefit from safer neighborhoods, a more vibrant and connected population that works to improve education, expand employment opportunities and increase economic self-reliance

A Center's Financial Backbone

Neighborhood Networks is not a grant program. HUD provides limited financial assistance and can help property owners, managers and center staff identify additional funding sources. The initiative encourages centers to become sustainable by developing partnerships with businesses, nonprofits, government and social services agencies, educational and health institutions, faith-based organizations, civic organizations and foundations which can provide cash and in-kind services.

HUD's Role in Neighborhood Networks

HUD encourages the creation and expansion of Neighborhood Networks centers by guiding property owners, managers, and center staff through the Neighborhood Networks center development process and providing limited financial assistance. HUD also provides technical assistance which covers a wide variety of topics critical to center development and long-term sustainability,

including partnership building, fundraising, grant-writing and business-plan development.

Available Resources

One of the unique advantages of a HUD Neighborhood Networks center is the scope of technical assistance options that is available to center planners at every state of a center's operation.

We've already told you about the technical assistance that is available by calling the Neighborhood Networks Information Center. While you are on the phone, inquire about the dozens of guides, fact sheets and other publications; conferences; workshops, mentoring and marketing materials that are available at no charge to Neighborhood Networks centers.

START Now!

Keep this manual handy and refer to it often. Use its recommendations, like filing the center's business plan using the easy-to-use online Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool, called START.

File your business plan with HUD and pending approval you soon will be a bonafide Neighborhood Networks center!

Welcome to the family of Neighborhood Networks centers nationwide.

Section 2: Neighborhood Networks Annotated Resources

Since most property owners and HUD have limited resources for operating the center, you must look to other organizations to see if their programs or assets can help meet your needs.   Having become an established computer center, you know that the fastest growing communication medium around is the World Wide Web. It is not a fad but has become integrated into our daily lives and is your best tool for quickly identifying opportunities or resources for your center.

The Internet's World Wide Web, or Web for short, has the capacity to keep up with the rapid pace of information today. With news changing daily, most organizations do not have the luxury of printing announcements or newspapers every day. On the other hand, an organization can update its web site by the minute, the hour, or whatever interval its webmaster chooses.

Nearly everything you may want or need to know can now be found on the Web. It is an excellent research tool, whether you are looking for additional information on asset mapping or on maintaining your 501(c)(3) status. All you need is a computer with a modem, a telephone line, and an Internet service provider. No longer do you need to look through volumes of information at your local library or make countless phone calls seeking an answer to your question.

The Neighborhood Networks Web site (http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org) is one of the first places you should look. Updated weekly, the site can be accessed day or night. Visitors can download publications, read the latest Neighborhood Networks news releases, find information about potential funding organizations, ask questions, and link to related web sites.

The Web site is tailored toward Neighborhood Networks stakeholders – HUD and center staff, residents of HUD housing, national and local partners and individuals concerned with community technology issues. For example, a Residents' Corner section was added to encourage residents to use the site. Residents' Corner contains important Web resources of interest to residents and success stories about other residents that have changed their lives through technology. A new News Room section features up-to-the minute news on the fast-growing initiative and targets all Neighborhood Networks stakeholders. Resources for Existing Centers, another section of the site, targets center staff, providing a wealth of information, guidance, and links to resources.

In addition to the Neighborhood Networks Web site, the following chart lists other resources you can access through the Internet to help build on your knowledge or identify additional opportunities. The list includes resources in eight different topic areas that will help start your research. The web sites also have links, which will take you to additional resources, which in turn, will have other links.

General Neighborhood Networks resources	
http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org	Your first stop in planning your center.
http://wbt.neighborhoodnetworks.org/	Neighborhood Networks Web-based workshops
http://www.hud.gov/nnw/startnewcenter/nnwbusiness.html	The Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START). Create and edit a Neighborhood Networks business plan.
Section 3:	

http://www.irs.gov	Provides links to all of the necessary 501(c)(3) forms and instructions on how to fill them out.
http://www.ctcnet.org/toc.htm	CTCnet's guide on developing a community technology center such as a Neighborhood Networks.
http://www.businesstown.com	Provides definitions of accounting and small business terms.
Section 4:	
http://www.nwu.edu/IPR/abcd.html	The ABCD Institute's John Kretzman and John McKnight developed and spread the concept of asset mapping – great link to a workbook and other asset mapping materials
http://www.ctcnet.org/ch2.htm	CTCnet's guide to asset mapping and finding resources in the community.
http://www.madii.org/amhome/amhome.html	The Madii Institute's general information on asset mapping.
http://www.ctassets.org/library/glossary.cfm	An asset mapping glossary.
Section 5:	
http://www.iit.edu/~livewire/	Provides Internet training to youths in Chicago and online.
http://www2.ctcnet.org/ctcweb.asp?webcat=youthed	Links to potential children's programs.
http://www.careerpath.com	Lists jobs available in the community and links to local training.
http://www.lgta.org	The Land-Grant Training Alliance offers free online basic computer skills training.
http://www.managementhelp.org/prog_mng/np_progs.htm	Basic Guide to Nonprofit Program Design and Marketing
http://www.usworkforce.org	Gives information on the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and how a center can become a WIA training provider.
Section 6:	
http://www.irs.gov	Provides links to all of the necessary 501(c)(3) forms and instructions on how to fill them our.
http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/18/85.html	Information of the IRS 990 form.
http://www.qual990.org/index.html	The Urban Institute's guide to the IRS 990 form.
http://www.allianceonline.org/faqs	Information on frequently asked questions regarding tax-exemption.
http://nonprofit.about.com/library.weekly/aa050599.htm	Provides suggestions on board or directors orientation materials.
http://www.nass.org	The National Association of Secretaries of State has information regarding individual state's requirements for obtaining 501(c)(3) status.
Section 7:	
http://www.financeproject.org/ostpartners.htm	Information on partnerships between nonprofits and other organizations.
http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/comsafe/2_1.html	Resources to create partnerships to tackle complex problems (link from the United Kingdom)
http://www.liscnet.org	Focuses on developing community through local partnerships.
National Partners as described in Section 7:	
http://www.aacc.nche.edu	American Association of Community Colleges
http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov	The Bureau of Primary Health Care

http://www.calstate.edu	California State University System
http://www.4woman.gov/COE/index.htm	Centers of Excellence in Women's Health
http://www.geocities.com/arttechycp/index.html	Digital Art Communities
http://www.hopeww.org	HOPE *worldwide* (HOPE)
http://www.ncoa.org	The National Council on the Aging (NCOA)
http://www.ncoa.org/CIN/cin_intro.html	The NCOA's Consumer Information Network
http://www.techforall.org	Technology For All
http://www.thinkquest.org	ThinkQuest
http://www.youthventure.org	Youth Venture
http://www.yar.org	Youth as Resources
Section 8:	
http://www.wkkf.org/publications/enalhdbk/default.html	The W.K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook is a good place to start when designing an evaluation.
http://www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm#anchor1575679	A basic guide to program evaluation.
http://www.united-way.org/outcomes	The United Way's overview of outcomes-based evaluation.
http://www.inetwork.org/repair/index.html	This site has guidelines for collecting information and analyzing data.
http://www.goa.gov/cgi-bin/ordtab.pl	The General Accounting Office has free books on designing evaluation, developing and using questionnaires, and interview techniques.
Other resources	
http://www.freeresumetips.com/resumetips/nonprofit.html	Suggestions on how to cater your resume for non-profit positions.
http://www.emedia1.mediainfo.com/emedia	Provides a searchable list of media contacts.
http://nonprofit.about.com/library/weekly/aa081297.htm	Information from about.com regarding fundraising tips.
http://www.cdfa.gov/public/cat-writing.htm	The Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance provides information on how to develop a successful grant proposal.
http://www.ctb.lsi.ukans.edu	The University of Kansas' Community Toolbox includes suggested hiring references.
http://classroom.sba.gov	The Small Business Administration Classroom has resources available with information on staffing.
http://www.trainingsupersite.com	Offers ideas on staff development and training.
http://www.foundations.org	A directory of charitable grantmakers with information about corporate, private and community foundations.
http://www.tgci.com	The Grantsmanship Center provides grant information and grantsmanship training for federal, state and community foundations.
www.not-for-profit.org	The Nonprofit Resource Center has a wealth of information on grants and funding.
http://www.foundationcenter.org	The Foundation Center is an independent nonprofit information clearinghouse that collects, organizes, analyzes and disseminates information on foundations and corporate giving

	programs.
http://www.businesstown.com/marketing/lowcost-marketing.asp	Provides information on how to market your center on a frugal budget.
http://www.helping.org	Helps nonprofits find donations and volunteers.
http://www.compumentor.org	Offers nonprofits discounts on computer software.
http://www.giftsinkind.org	Offers nonprofits discounts on computer software.
http://www.npower.org	Offers advice on technology planning and grant writing.
http://www.technograms.com/moretips.htm	Offers advice on writing successful grant proposals.

2.1 Neighborhood Networks' Publications

There are many Neighborhood Networks publications available to centers. These factsheets, guides and other publications can provide detailed information on almost all aspects of the initiative. To find out which publications are available, click here: http://www.hud.gov/nnw/resourcesforcenters/nnwpublications.html

To order these Neighborhood Networks publications, call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at (888) 312-2743.

Section 3: Networking

Twenty-five years ago, the word "networking" had an entirely different meaning and application than it does today. With the onset of personal computers and the need for them to talk to each other, "networking" has become one of the most commonly used words in today's world. We network our computers at the office so we can share and access each other's information. We log onto the Internet so we can tap into the ultimate application of networking or information sharing - the World Wide Web.

But "networking" also refers to one's ability to make contacts. As a center that has been open for at least a year, networking is a vital component to the center's continued success. In this context, networking means building relations with businesses, academic and health care institutions, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and other stakeholders to help achieve common goals. Networking also can be between other Neighborhood Networks centers either in a mentoring relationship or for consortia building. Along with being an integral part of business and relationship development, networking will help your center gain recognition within the community and this recognition can lead to partnerships.

It is important to note that networking does not necessarily mean partnering. Networking means getting to know your community better and opening doors that were closed last year when your center had not yet proven itself; whereas a partnership requires resource sharing from both organizations. You are an active participant in your community, others in the community should and will listen to you. Use this to propel your center into the future.

This section will take you through the keys of networking: evaluating your center to see how you fit into your community as well as building relationships through center-to-center mentoring and Neighborhood Networks consortia.

3.1 Evaluating the Center

One of the first steps in networking with others in your community is relating how much the center has contributed during your first year in business. In Section 8 of Open for Business: A Primer for Starting a Neighborhood Networks Center, you should have used the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START) to record the successes of your first year as a Neighborhood Networks center.

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Want more information?

Neighborhood Networks offers many guides and fact sheets relating to numerous topics in this manual. Call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at (888) 312-2743, visit the Web site or use the reference to the publication order form in Section 2 to obtain these helpful tools. Here is some suggested reading for this section:

- *The Benefits of Starting and Working with a Neighborhood Networks Center*
- *Resource Guide (Second Edition)*
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Whether or not you used START for evaluation, it is important to review what your center accomplished after your first year. Here is the evaluation form from START. Take a quick review of your answers from Manual One or, if you have not used START, evaluate your center now.

If you are unfamiliar with using START as an evaluation method, refer to Manual 1, Section 8.

1. Resident Involvement	
1.	Some residents involved in center planning and providing feedback on center program needs and center operational needs.
2.	Active resident involvement in center planning, programs and operations; Process and information gathering forms/tools to uncover resident program and center operational needs and resident satisfaction.
3.	Increasing resident satisfaction as through center feedback forms; center process to actively manage alignment between center usage, programs and resources.
4.	High resident/center user satisfaction as measured by customer feedback forms; high center utilization rates; residents volunteer in center for programs and center management.
5.	Broad, active resident involvement in volunteering, center management, programming and operations; outreach and center programs for unserved or under-served resident populations.

2. Community Involvement	
1.	There is little involvement of the community beyond the center location.
2.	Growing community involvement in center's programs; The center is engaging the community in the planning process.
3.	Community is part of center's programs planning process; Community members are represented on the Center Advisory Board; Community involvement is consistent with program plans.
4.	Active volunteerism in center program and management; High and constant utilization of the center by different populations (learning and teaching from each other)
5.	A branch of center is established in the community or school.

3. Business Plan	
1.	Used for HUD approval and to start the center
2.	Used as internal strategic planning and program operations-tracking tool
3.	Used as external marketing document to attract partners, allies and center funding.
4.	Used as a process to involve residents, stakeholders, and others in programming priorities, strategies, financial planning and fundraising.

5.	Used as a tool to evaluate center performance, learn continuous improvement , and innovate programs and outreach.

4. Evaluation

1.	Assess resident and community needs as well as readiness of sponsor support for the center; performance indicators in place.
2.	Rate quarterly performance and review progress against Business Plan and programming goals; tracking results/outcomes.
3.	Address program impact and results to show return on investment for partners and stakeholders publicize jobs, test score improvement, school achievement, health improvement, crime reduction, etc.
4.	Evaluating funding sources to strategically focus on sustaining the center; show ROI for partners and stakeholders.
5.	Re-assess center programs, customers, and center operations to re-focus on greatest needs.

5. Advisory Board

1.	Limited site-specific membership on board; Used for planning and direction; Strong community leadership center.
2.	Active resident, property manager, and community organization and members; board-level center champions emerging.
3.	Board members who know how to access resources and build alliances; Board members with management experience to provide insight into the center's operation and management.
4.	Implementation of two advisory boards: resident programs and planning (operation vs. strategy); boards evaluate center performance and recommend actions on regular basis; board recruits new members with broad experience and skills based on center needs.
5.	Advisory Board re-evaluates and renews center programming and strategy; new board members who will provide innovative ideas, funding approaches and networks.

6. Program Development

1.	Initial programming designed based on feedback regarding resident and community needs; informal needs assessment and asset mapping process leading to programming decisions.
2.	center programs are structured and prioritized according to resident needs; active programs drives center orientation; increases breadth and diversity of programs.
3.	High level of resident utilization and satisfaction in center programming; center accurately assesses and revises programs as resident and community needs change; center has project and program ideas to develop in the next 3 years;

		programs tied to results in job growth, diplomas and other measurements.
	4.	center focuses on reinventing itself -- changes and restructures program; program offerings may increase based on renewal of the mission and purpose of the center; center uses partners to deliver programs.
	5.	Programs directly relate to the residents serving the outside community; center has at least 25% more/new programs than when it started; center addressing alternative ways of delivering programs (satellite centers, networking with other groups, internet distribution)

7. Staffing		
	1.	center champion: person or small group of people with Neighborhood Networks vision for center preparation and launch.
	2.	1-2 full-time employees; one-on-one volunteer program, which is delivered through a partner or by individuals in the community
	3.	Staff expertise in management, program development, funding and partnership development; volunteer instructors with set curriculum; institutional relationships for volunteers; staff have specific job functions.
	4.	Staff is reorganized; transfer of management responsibility from early champions to managers and administrators; center enhances its management team with new or advisory managers;
	5.	Plans to minimize staff turnover and recruit new staff from partners, residents and community; emerging leaders from volunteers, partners, and current staff.

8. Funding		
	1.	Limited resources/funding from owners/ property managers and HUD.
	2.	Center mainly funded by HUD through residual receipts account, funds borrowed from the Reserve for Replacement account, excess income, rent increase, request for special rent adjustment or owner's equity.
	3.	Budget growth; moving toward break even; in-kind contributions of resources and capital equipment; center beginning to receive additional funding from alternative sources – partners and allies, grants, early center alumni.
	4.	center at break-even; more diverse portfolio of funders; active, well-managed process to address funding and other resource needs; using business plan as instrument to attract funding.
	5.	Center achieves and maintains sustainability; great diversity of funders; consistent support from partners, allies, and other funding sources.

9. Computers		
	1.	Equipment to meet basic program needs.
	2.	Computers are proportional to use and programming needs.
	3.	Access to the Internet; quality; computers within 18 months of new equipment on

	the market.
4.	Center replenishes its technology portfolio on a regular bases; equipment needs directly linked to programming and resident needs.
5.	Technology of the center meets advanced program needs; Computers are networked and Internet ready.

10. Partnerships	
1.	Beginning to look for community members for potential partnerships
2.	2 partners in the community that directly contribute to the centers goals and mission; alliance/joint venture with other community organizations (to join with to provide programs).
3.	Marketing the center and gaining more partners in the process; Beginning brand name identity.
4.	Active networking with other centers at a similar level of growth and development; sharing of ideas and approaches.
5.	Local or regional mentoring of other Neighborhood Networks centers or other similar social service organizations; center brand is established through Public Relations, publications and awards; the center has built a permanent tie with a corporate sponsor.

3.2 Analyzing the Results

An evaluation tool such as START can only help your center so much on paper. By analyzing and interpreting the results of the planning tool, you can begin to understand where your center needs to go in Year 2 and beyond.

Networking can help your center increase the strength of its programs and find better partnerships. Here are some suggestions for networking in your community based on your self-evaluation:

❑ Resident Involvement:
  ❑ Resident groups. Sometimes, residents may feel out of touch with the center. Be an advocate of your programs and partnerships and go to resident meetings. Face-to-face marketing is usually the best kind.
  ❑ Property activities. Some communities sponsor Bar-B-Q's or other programs for the residents that are outside of the scope of the center. If a center director attends these events, residents begin to trust you and may frequent your center.
❑ Community Involvement:
  ❑ Do residents have children going to local public schools? If you build a relationship with principals or guidance

counselors, you can work on a child's education inside and outside of the classroom.

❑ Major employers. If there are a few major employers in the area, it may be wise to speak with someone in human resources. Sometimes, large employers will offer discounted travel to ease the commute of a large group of employees. Discounted commuting costs are one of the potential incentives that a large employer may offer a group of residents to attract them to work for the company. Remember, for the employer, a happy home makes for a happy employee.

❑ Colleges and universities:
  ❑ Institutions of higher learning are always trying to improve the community. Tap into this network and show how the center can be a foundation for community education.

❑ Business Plan:
  ❑ Other nonprofits. Every community has nonprofits that help residents. If you feel your business plan needs a shot in the arm, look at other nonprofits' business plans. Even if they do not offer similar services, this type of networking may lead to some great ideas for your center.
  ❑ Law students or law offices. Most law students and lawyers have to do pro-bono work to fulfill community obligations. Enlist their help for ideas and language to improve your business plan.

❑ Evaluation:
  ❑ Local businesses. Most large for-profit businesses evaluate their companies on a quarterly basis. It is very important to make their earnings and please their investors. These businesses have professional evaluators that try to save the company money. They might have suggestions for your center and how to do the same thing.
  ❑ Consultants. If you can afford it, nonprofit consultants can assist you with your evaluation. They typically have an outsider's perspective and can notice areas of improvement based on other nonprofits with whom they have worked.

❑ Advisory Board:
  ❑ Community leaders. Sometimes an advisory board or board of directors becomes stagnant and unproductive. Look to reseed the board by finding contacts within the community. Speak with activists – they may want to serve on your board or may know someone who would be great for the job.

Don't worry!

Whether or not you completed the evaluation using START, it is important to realize a few things about self-evaluation and how it ties into networking:
❑ Most people are their own biggest critics
❑ Potential stakeholders and partners never have to see your self-evaluation. To them, and everyone else looking at the center, you have accomplished much in your first year. Make sure to always talk up your strong points and network to find partners that can help you move beyond your first self-evaluation.

❏ Program Development:
  ❏ Colleges and universities. One of the goals for many centers is to help residents find jobs. Colleges and universities have the same goals and may be able to share best practices with you.
  ❏ Local service deliverers. Look to companies and organizations that provide services to your residents. For example, a local hospital may be offering a health clinic and offer reduced-cost services to residents.
❏ Staffing:
  ❏ Local schools, colleges and universities. Many schools require volunteer work as a stipulation for graduation. Tap into a new set of volunteers.
  ❏ Local job recruiters. Job recruiters will give you advice on how to lower staff turnover rates and how to attract the best candidates to your center.
❏ Funding:
  ❏ Banks: Banks know much about the money coming in and out of the community. Tap into this resource and ask for advice about potential funding sources.
  ❏ Local newspapers. Many local periodicals have classified ads for nonprofit funding sources. Also keep an eye out for feature stories on philanthropists in your community.
❏ Computers:
  ❏ Nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Most companies reinvest in computer equipment every one to two years. Ask them where the old computers go and see if they can be utilized by your center.
  ❏ Many people are finding jobs by rebuilding used computers through local computer companies. These computers can be donated to your Neighborhood Networks center for low to no cost.
❏ Partnerships:
  ❏ Local nonprofit organizations. Your center probably has partners from the community, but sometimes the relationship does not yield all that was promised. Ask other nonprofits in the area about their partners – you may learn of a new organization that will help your center.
  ❏ Non-related businesses. If your partnerships are going well or not, your center is now a player in the community. Test out your clout and try to partner with the organizations that did not show much interest in the first year of your center.

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth

Most of us have heard of this statement and learned that if someone offers you something for free, it is wise to accept it without any questions. If your center is offered free computer equipment, make sure it fits the standards of your center. Many businesses are so anxious to get rid of their old equipment, they will donate computers to nonprofits that have little to no use in a modern technology center like Neighborhood Networks.

3.3 Networking with Neighborhood Networks

Along with organizations in your community, the national Neighborhood Networks initiative offers some assistance in networking. Working with other centers may provide some of the best relationships that benefit your center. From sharing programs to learning about funding sources to simply having a contact that understands what it means to be a Neighborhood Networks center director, Neighborhood Networks connections are invaluable. There are two ways to network through the national initiative.

3.3.1 Center-to-Center Mentoring

The center-to-center mentoring program is based on the idea that a center's peers are often its best source of assistance. The program revolves around one-on-one mentoring of less-experienced centers with more experienced centers.

Each relationship is custom built to ensure that each mentored center receives assistance geared to its specific skill level. Depending on centers' needs, schedules and other variables, mentoring relationships can vary in the type and range of issues addressed, intensity and duration.

To help centers get the most out of mentoring arrangements, each center mentoring pair is assigned a specific Neighborhood Networks team member who will help set priorities and goals and track accomplishments.

If you are interested in finding out more regarding center-to-center mentoring, call the Neighborhood Networks hotline at (888) 312-2743.

3.3.2 Neighborhood Networks Consortia

A Neighborhood Networks consortium is a group of Neighborhood Networks center and partners whose purpose is to support Neighborhood Networks centers. Neighborhood Networks consortia serve different purposes in different areas, but all consortia:
- ❑ Include all centers in a geographic region,
- ❑ Hold regular meetings, and
- ❑ Undertake a broad range of activities to support centers, such as sharing information and resources, fundraising, and developing partnerships

Neighborhood Networks consortia exist across the country and have provided many benefits to participating centers:

GET THIS!

Neighborhood Networks has published a new guide on developing Neighborhood Networks consortia. It is packed with information and resources and is available on the Neighborhood Networks Web site at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Get your copy today!

- ❑ Attract larger local partners with great resources because the consortium has much greater assets than an individual Neighborhood Networks center.
- ❑ Approach these larger partners in a coordinated effort of all regional Neighborhood Networks centers.
- ❑ Be a channel and conduit for resources from national corporations and organizations.
- ❑ Provide training for Neighborhood Networks center staff.
- ❑ Develop a media strategy and generate media coverage.
- ❑ Plan conferences and meetings for sharing information, resources, and networking.
- ❑ Market Neighborhood Networks to owners, managing agents, potential partners, etc.

If you are interested in finding out more regarding consortia, call the Neighborhood Networks hotline at (888) 312-2743.

Or visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site for the guide *Building Community: A Guide for Starting Neighborhood Networks Consortia.* It lists resources, tells success stories and provides strategies for forming consortia in your community.

Consortia Success Stories

Neighborhood Networks Consortium Raises More Than $4,000

SEATTLE – Digital Promise, a Neighborhood Networks consortium here, raised more than $4,000 by selling tickets to the Seattle Symphony's sixth annual U.S. Bank All Community Concert, held June 8.
Digital Promise was among eight nonprofits selected by a panel of community leaders to split the concert's proceeds. For consideration, area nonprofits had to submit a plan to the symphony, detailing how its staff would publicize the concert and sell tickets. Digital Promise, in its first fundraising effort, sold more than 240 tickets and allowed the consortium to gain high visibility in the community.

"We told them about Digital Promise, what we do and explained that we would post information on the concert on our Web site and approach our partners, other nonprofits, family and friends," said Delia Burke, program development manager of Digital Promise. "It's really exciting that we were able to raise over $4,000 in our first ever fundraiser."

Digital Promise, composed of 24 Neighborhood Networks centers and five other community technology centers, plans to use the money to hire staff and enhance current programs.

A Neighborhood Networks consortium is a group of centers in the same geographic region that collaborate to expand opportunities for HUD residents. More than 100 Neighborhood Networks centers belong to seven consortia across the country, using them for assistance with program development, funding and networking.

Formed in 1997, Digital Promise assists HUD residents in overcoming economic and educational barriers by promoting access to computer technology in low-income housing communities. The Neighborhood Networks consortium has helped start and maintain more than 35 computer learning centers in low-income housing developments in Washington, distributed over $50,000 worth of hardware and software, and secured $40,000 in direct funding for the center.

Digital Promise Educates Public, Honors Supporters

On the night of the concert, Digital Promise set up an information table in the lobby of the concert hall to inform patrons about the consortium's programs and services. The table included information about Neighborhood Networks centers belonging to the consortium and a computer presentation produced by Digital Promise.

Digital Promise also hosted a reception prior to the concert to honor those who have contributed to its founding and development. Seattle City Councilmember Nick Licata and HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator Tarrie Cooper were among those in attendance.

"The concert was a great event, bringing social service organizations that serve low-income populations together in celebration of the arts and the community," said Joe Diehl, president of Digital Promise. "This event allowed Digital Promise to launch its first fundraising campaign in a successful way. We had [our] entire board selling tickets as a team effort.

Section 4: Forming a Strategic Plan and Making Business Decisions

As a center director, one of the things that you probably learned in your first year managing a Neighborhood Networks center is that there are lots of decisions that need to be made. Decisions that must be made quickly but that you know will have a lasting impact on your center. If you have found yourself wondering if decisions made during a harried day at the office helped your center move toward its long- term vision, the center may need a strategic plan.

A strategic plan is a tool to help you manage the center. It is used to help your center focus its energy and to ensure that everyone is working towards the same objectives. It will help you and the center's advisory board capitalize on the successes of Year 1, while making adjustments for lessons learned. A strategic plan should answer multiple questions about the center's future, such as:

- What are the primary goals of the center?
- Who does the center target as center users?
- What are your center's plans for the future?

Designing a strategic plan for a center enables the organization to react to challenges that may arise in the future - whether they are foreseen or unpredictable. Being strategic means being clear about the organization's objectives, being aware of the center's resources and incorporating both into being responsive to a dynamic community environment.

The process involves planning because it is about intentionally setting goals, choosing a desired future and developing an approach to achieving those goals. Strategic planning is an exciting opportunity for the center's organizers to think of new programs and partners and to dream about the future. Remember to take a light approach to the whole process and the ideas and goals will flow much easier.

This section will help you understand the benefits of strategic planning, timing and preparing for the process, organizing a strategic planning committee, suggestions on how to write a strategic plan and tips for implementing the plan.

4.1 Benefits of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning serves a variety of purposes in a Neighborhood Networks center:

Start with START

Neighborhood Networks' Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START) is a planning device for centers.

Make sure to utilize START throughout the planning process, including this section.

Visit START at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org

- ❑ It clearly defines the purpose of the center and establishes realistic goals and objectives.
- ❑ It articulates those goals and objectives to the residents and other center stakeholders.
- ❑ Insures the most effective use of the center's resources by focusing them on he key priorities. It provides a base from which progress can be measured and establishes a mechanism for informed change, when needed.
- ❑ It builds a sense of community.

4.2 Timing of the Strategic Planning Process

The best time to conduct a strategic plan is after a center evaluates its first year. In Section 3, you will have read that your center should have been evaluated and the focus of Year 2 identified. This plan, in correlation with the self-evaluation, should be conducted in time to identify the organizational goals for the coming year. It should identify the center's goals and the resources and funding needed to achieve those goals.

Manual 1, *Open for Business*, also should have prepared your center to begin the strategic planning process in Year 2. In Manual One, your center should have written a business plan using the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START), considered and submitted the application for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, developed programs and community partners, and begun the self-evaluation process.

It is important to note that a strategic plan is not needed every year. If a center is comfortable with its plan, it should not conduct one annually. At least try to think of new strategies once every three years.

4.3 Preparation for Strategic Planning

Many center directors, especially after the first year on the job, have so many daily tasks to complete, that sitting down and developing strategies for the next year may be intimidating. It may seem as if you are too close to the organization to be objective about its goals. The following ideas may help your center get the most out of strategic planning:

- ❑ The real benefit of the strategic planning process is the process, not the plan document.
- ❑ There is no "perfect" plan. There's doing your best at strategic thinking and implementation, and learning from what you're doing to enhance what you will do in the future.

Strategic planning versus Long-range planning

Many people use these two terms interchangeably, but strategic planning and long-range planning differ in complexity.

Long-range planning generally means the development of a plan for accomplishing a center's goals in an environment that remains the same.

Strategic planning assumes that an organization must remain on its toes and react to unpredicted changes. With Neighborhood Networks, the economy may be booming or in recession and the center has to react. The local school system may drop all computer education curricula and the center may be relied upon to provide this training. When thinking about the future, know what you can predict about your community and what you cannot assume. This will make the strategic planning process much easier.

- ❑ The strategic planning process is usually not an "aha!" experience. It's like the management process itself -- it's a series of small moves that together keep the organization doing things right and heading in the right direction.
- ❑ In planning, things usually aren't as bad as you fear -- nor as good as you'd like.
- ❑ Start simple, but start!

4.4 The Strategic Plan Committee

A team of center stakeholders, including partners and active residents should conduct the process. These people are setting the goals of your center for the next few years and therefore should be closely connected with the activities of the center. Although most committee members will know what your center did in the past year, sometimes it is good to have a new face with fresh ideas. A new partner or active community resident may provide many new ideas that will help your center. Here are some suggestions on the make up of the strategic planning committee:

- ❑ The center director and board chairperson should be included in the planning group, and should drive development and implementation of the plan.
- ❑ Establish clear guidelines for membership, for example, those directly involved in planning, who will provide key information to the process, who will review the plan document, those who will implement the document, etc.
- ❑ A primary responsibility of a board of directors is strategic planning to effectively lead the organization. Therefore, insist that the board be strongly involved in planning.
- ❑ Ask if the board membership is representative of the center's residents and community. If they are not, the organization may want to involve more representation in planning.
- ❑ Always include in the group at least one person who ultimately has authority to make strategic decisions. This could be the center director, the property owner or one of the board members.
- ❑ Make sure that as many stakeholders as possible are involved in the planning process.
- ❑ Involve someone to administrate the process, including arranging meetings, helping to record key information, helping with flipcharts, monitoring status of pre-work, etc.
- ❑ Consider having the administrator record the major steps in the planning process to help the organization conduct its own planning when the plan is updated.

4.5 The Strategic Planning Process

Well, after much preparation, your center is ready to begin the planning process. New planners usually want to know how many meetings will be needed and what is required for each meeting. This process doesn't need to be overly formal, but establishing rules of order is a good idea. The number of meetings depends on whether or not the center has done planning before, how many strategic issues and goals the center faces, whether the committee members are used to long or short meetings and how much time your center can give to the whole process.

Try to have the meetings at most two weeks apart. If it is longer than that, then many committee members will lose interest and the process will lose momentum. Also, at the meetings, it is important to let all committee members participate in the brainstorming sessions. It is during these sessions that the best ideas for moving forward will be created, but make sure the brainstorming session isn't too long because people can become tired and frustrated.

4.5.1 Strategic Plan Example

Here is an example of the strategic planning process:

❑ Planning starts with a half-day or all-day board retreat and includes introductions by the board chairperson and/or center director, their explanations of the organization's benefits from strategic planning and the organization's commitment to the

planning process, the facilitator's overview of the planning process, and the board chairperson's and/or director's explanation of who will be involved in the planning process. At the retreat, the organization may then begin the next step in planning, whether this be visiting the mission, vision, values, etc. or identifying current issues and goals to which strategies will need to be developed. (Goals are often reworded issues.) Planners are asked to think about strategies before the next meeting.

❑ The next meeting focuses on finalizing strategies to deal with each issue. Before the next meeting, a subcommittee is charged to draft the planning document, which includes updated mission, vision, and values and finalized strategic issues, goals, strategies. This document is distributed before the next meeting.

❑ In the next meeting, planners exchange feedback about the content and format of the planning document. Feedback is incorporated in the document and it is distributed before the next meeting.

❑ The next meeting does not require full attention to the plan since the strategic planning document will be implemented by the center staff.

❑ The staff may take this document and establish a yearly-operating plan that details the strategies that will be implemented over the next year, who will implement them, and the timetable.

No matter how serious organizations are about strategic planning, they usually have strong concerns about being able to find time to attend frequent meetings. This concern can be addressed by assuring that meetings are well managed, making sure they are relatively short and that as few are conducted as possible. Also, make sure that expectations about the planning project are realistic.

Use the next subsections to focus on the content of your strategic plan.

4.5.2 Developing A Plan
When a consortium is ready to begin operating, a strategic planning session becomes an appropriate time to brainstorm who major players and partners should be, the purpose of the plan and how the plan will be implemented. Strategic planning requires a series of decisions and should be a living document the center will utilize.

How do you begin the planning process? There is no correct approach to formulating a strategic plan, but the following components may assist a center in the process:

❑ **Hold several brainstorming sessions.** Ideally, someone who is not directly involved in the center's work should facilitate the brainstorming meetings since that person will have an objective standpoint. HUD Coordinators or consultants hired by HUD can

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How to Hold a Brainstorming Session

The facilitator should ask questions that will help the Board members identify the steps needed to achieve the consortium's goal. The questions above may be used as prompting questions. After the members come up with enough ideas, the facilitator should help the attendees' chose the ideas that have the broadest focus; these will make up the goals of the organization. With the help of all the participants, the facilitator should categorize the rest of the ideas under these goals; these will make up the objectives. An example of an idea with a broad focus may be "Sustainability" and an idea with a narrow focus that may be listed under "Sustainability" may be "Develop Partnership Strategy." Grouping the ideas into clutters will enable the members to have a visual chart of their priorities in front of them.

help facilitate these brainstorming sessions. Take notes during the meetings, so that everyone's ideas are captured accurately. Following the brainstorming meetings, appoint someone to formulate a list of goals and objectives based on what has been discussed during the meetings. Working groups or future brainstorming sessions can then focus on each goal to determine they fit under particular objective, generate more objectives, if necessary, and develop tasks to accomplish each objective.

❑ Review the membership and capacity of the center. Utilizing the membership survey, competencies matrix or membership contact report, and asses the time members can commit to the strategic planning process and the center as a whole. A quick assessment of how many hours each member can devote for the center's meeting and activities is helpful to develop a sound and realistic strategic plan.

❑ Appoint a committee. An executive committee can become helpful in the strategic planning process to assist in making key decisions early on in the planning process. This committee can be appointed by the members and can serve as the unified voice for the center. Strategic planning requires a series of decisions such as approving a mission statement, agreeing on the organization's priorities, determining goals based on these priorities, and approving the strategic plan. An executive committee can assist in compiling the groups' ideas, decision on a mission statement and in preparing the final document.

4.5.2.1 Some Questions Helpful in Developing a Strategic Plan
❑ Who are the stakeholders?
❑ Who will the center serve?
❑ What will the geographic area served by the center be?
❑ What is the purpose of the center? What is our objective? What are the ends we seek?
❑ What courses of action might lead to the ends we seek?
❑ What capabilities and capacities are required to reach the ends we seek?
❑ What are the means at our disposal?
❑ What will we acquire through partnerships and other alliances?
❑ What are potential partners?
❑ What will we receive from donors and grants?
❑ Who are potential donors and what are grants available to the center?
❑ How are our actions restrained or constrained by the means at our disposal?
❑ What programs and services do we want to offer?

4.5.3 Writing the Strategic Plan

A strategic plan should incorporate a few key items. Refer to this list when you are drafting your strategic plan.

Mission Statement: A mission statement tells the world what an organization does, whom it serves and why it exists. It is a tool that helps your center communicate the essence of your organization to your stakeholders and to the public. Example: "We are a committed non-profit corporation dedicated to assisting residents to overcome economic and educational barriers by promoting and expanding access to computer technology in low-income housing communities." Digital Promise (the Neighborhood Networks Center in Washington State)'s mission statement.

Vision Statement: This is a statement that draws a picture of the ideal world that would happen if the organization achieves its mission. Example: "We envision a community in which people, regardless of economic or educational status, have equal access to computer technology." Digital Promise's vision statement

Core values: Examples include Building a diverse community; Working as a team; Transferring knowledge through mentoring and coaching; Accepting personal responsibility and fostering personal integrity; Building an environment where it is safe to express opinions and creativity; Being held accountable by producing measurable results; Fostering hope and opportunity within the community.

Background of the organization, description of membership

Explanation of the strategic planning process: This should include details on how and when the process started, its evolution, etc.

Workplan: This is the meat of the plan. Include the steps the center should take to accomplish its goals and objectives. Depending on the style of the plan, the center may use several layers to list these steps such as goals, objectives, tasks, strategies, action items, etc.

Plan for evaluation: Include a short description of how the organization plans to revisit the document to ensure it is being implemented.

4.5.4 Tips on Writing the Strategic Plan

Create a summary strategic plan to be shared with the outside audience. People are more likely to read a short document that only highlights the most important information rather than reading a lengthy paper full of details that are not necessarily relevant to their needs and interests.

In the Strategic Plan, explain each goal and objective's significance to your center in couple of sentences. During the strategic plan development process, thinking about the significance of the goals and objectives will enable the Board members to determine whether it is appropriate to include a specific goal or objective in the strategic plan. These short paragraphs are also useful after the document is created. Once the strategic plan is developed, it sometimes takes a while before the Board members revisit the document, and this may cause them to forget about the purpose of taking a specific step and will prevent everyone in the Board from being on the same page. Having these short explanations will keep the Board members in harmony.

As far as the schedule of the members allow; try to hold strategic planning meetings every three to four weeks to maintain momentum. Ideally, a strategic plan should be completed between two to three months. However, the center may need more time depending on the length of each meeting and the Board members' commitment to the development of a strategic plan.

Invite all members to be involved in the process and encourage the involvement of persons that may not be involved in the organization but who have worked or still work for the center. These people may contribute to the document by bringing their experience and knowledge to the table. For instance, VISTA volunteers and administrative staff have a better understanding of the issues of the non-profits and small organizations, HUD staff are familiar with the official rules that the organization should follow and the Neighborhood Networks staff adds the service recipients' perspective. However, make sure that the number of the people who are not Board members attending the meetings doesn't exceed the number of the Board members because this may cause the creation of a document that may not be achievable by or satisfying to the Board members.

Once the strategic plan is finalized, make sure that each member receives a copy of the strategic plan. This will increase the sense of ownership of the document, and more importantly of the center for the members.

4.5.4.1 Strategic Plan Outline

The following strategic plan outline provides the basic layout of a strategic plan and examples of plans of Neighborhood Networks centers.

Sample Neighborhood Networks Center Strategic Plan

Goals
        Goal I
…………
Objectives
        Objective 1
…………
Strategies
        Strategy 1
…………
Action Items
        Action Item 1
…………
Tasks
        Task 1
…………

[There are several ways of organizing the strategic plan. If the center has a long list of goals, objectives and actions, for reference purposes it would be best to use numbers and letters to organize them.

Example:

I) Goal
        Reaching Sustainability

Objectives
        Objective 1) Building Partnerships
            ♦ Identify potential partners
            ♦ Assess local organizations
            ♦ Research on the Internet
            ♦ Look into organizations that have partnerships with the Board members' original organizations
            ♦ Contact potential partners
            ♦ Create an introductory letter
            ♦ Follow-up the letter with a phone call
            ♦ Set up a meeting
            ♦ Develop partnerships with interested potential partners
            ♦ Determine the ways to work together
            ♦ Create a written document listing the programs and services that will be organized with the partner
            ♦ Formalize the partnership by developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
        Objective 2) Raising Funds
            ♦ Apply for grants
            ♦ Research grants available through national and local foundations
            ♦ Select couple of grants to apply

- Fill the applications forms
- Get technical assistance, if needed
- Organize fundraising events
- Determine fundraising activities
- Estimate the cost of organizing a fundraising event
- Designate a budget for the event
- Plan for the event
- Recruit donors
- Identify Board members' contacts and other individuals who may be
- interested in the Center's mission
- Send a letter to the potential donors to introduce them to the Center
- Follow-up the letter with phone call
- Invite responsive potential donors to a Board meeting

[If the center prefers to identify only the main goals and objectives, and to decide on specific actions as they move along, the model below may be appropriate.]

Example:

Goal 1: Reaching Sustainability
Objectives
- Building Partnerships
- Raising Funds
- Marketing the Center

Goal 2: Providing Services
Objectives
- Assess the Needs of the Centers
- Create Services

4.6 Implement the Plan

One of the biggest problems with strategic plans comes when it is time to implement the changes. Everyone is excited at the end of the planning sessions about the center's new direction, but they may not be excited to make the necessary changes needed for implementation. Here are some suggestions so your strategic plan doesn't collect dust next to a computer:

❑ When conducting the planning process, involve the people who will be responsible for implementing the plan. Use a cross-section of your center so that everyone is represented.

- Make sure the plan is realistic. Continue asking planning participants "Is this realistic? Can you really do this?"
- Organize the overall strategic plan into smaller action plans, often including an action plan or work plan for those stakeholders, such as staff, board members and residents, who will be assisting with implementation.
- In the overall planning document, specify who is doing what and by when. (Often, action plans are referenced in the implementation section of the overall strategic plan). Some centers may elect to include the action plans in a separate document from the strategic plan, which would include only the mission, vision, values, key issues and goals and strategies. This approach carries some risk that the center will lose focus on the action plans.
- In an implementation section in the plan, specify and clarify the plan's implementation roles and responsibilities. Be sure to detail the first 90 days of the implementation of the plan. Build in regular reviews of status of the implementation of the plan.
- Translate the strategic plan's actions into job descriptions and personnel performance reviews.
- Communicate the role of follow-ups to the plan. If people know the action plans will be regularly reviewed, those who implement it tend to be proactive about doing their job.
- Be sure to document and distribute the plan, including inviting review input from all, especially the center's most active residents.
- Be sure that one internal person has ultimate responsibility that the plan is put into action in a timely manner. This is usually the center director, but the planning committee may find value in electing someone else to be in charge of implementation.
- The center director's support of the plan is a major driver to the plan's implementation. Integrate the plan's goals and objectives into the center director's performance reviews.
- Place emphasis on feedback to all of the stakeholders involved in the planning process.
- Have designated rotating "checkers" to verify if each individual completed their assigned tasks.
- Have pairs of people be responsible for tasks. Have each partner commit to helping the other to finish tasks on time.

Don't be afraid to change.

One way to begin thinking about a strategic plan is to assess the center's mission statement. Have each member of the planning committee read your mission statement and see if it still fits the organization. This should be a good way to begin the brainstorming session.

By the time the strategic planning sessions end, you may have a new and improved mission statement.

Section 5: Running a Sound Business

The first year of a Neighborhood Networks center was focused on general operations: developing programs, nurturing partnerships and other general start-up activities. Now that your center has matured beyond year one, there are some strategies and tools, beyond strategic planning, to help you make sure that it stays on track. Using wise business practices will help keep the center credible and attractive to partners, funders, users, the community, and other stakeholders. Also, crisis decision-making can be avoided and the staff, particularly the center director, will feel more in control of the center's direction and the workday.

This section focuses on three strategies or tools that will help you monitor the center's situation and know, beforehand, if corrections need to be made. One such tool is an annual audit to assure that the center is staying financially sound. A second strategy is to stay in compliance with the Internal Revenue Service by completing all reporting requirements. The third, "Staffing in Year Two" is making sure the center's staff is fully utilized and effective.

5.1 Neighborhood Networks Center Audit

An audit is a process for testing the accuracy and completeness of information presented in an organization's financial statements. Even if your Neighborhood Networks center is a nonprofit, you must keep "the books." This process of accounting was described in Manual 1, Section 3 and can be completed by using the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START). An audit allows for an independent certified public accountant (CPA) to observe if your financial statements comply with generally accepted accounting principles.

The audit report is addressed to the board of directors and usually includes the following:
- ❑ A cover letter from the auditor stating whether or not the center's accounting principles are sound
- ❑ The financial statements, including the balance sheet, the income statement and the statement of cash flows.
- ❑ Notes accompanying the financial statement which might include information on depreciation, contributions and volunteer service.

The auditor will ask for information about your center to confirm bank balances, contribution amounts and the money moving in and out of your center. He or she will ask for information regarding all of your finances

over the course of the year. If you have kept the center's bank account in order and recorded all of the money coming into the center (funding from the property, contributions, etc.) and out of the center (supplies, payroll, etc.) the auditing process should not be a difficult one. Also, recording your budget in START will assist the auditor in performing his or her duties.

5.1.1 Audit Requirements

Some nonprofits are legally required to obtain audits. Many states require them for nonprofits that receive contributions over a certain amount or receive funding from the federal or state government. Contact the local office of the Secretary of State or visit the National Association of Secretaries of State at http://www.nass.org.

You may elect to have an audit done even if you are not legally required to do so. Oftentimes, funders request audited financial statements, though they will regularly accept an in-house version.

The board of directors or governors may request that an audit be done of the center's finances, especially after the first year of operation. This is done to satisfy their need to oversee the process of running the center and to make sure that the center is on the right track. If you keep your books accurately, an audit will confirm the control you have over the center and will reflect well on you.

Finally, an audit signals a new phase in the center's maturity.   As your center's finances become more complex as you serve a greater audience and collect funding from a variety of sources, undergoing the analysis of an audit will help you and your staff understand the processes necessary to easily manage your center's business. Also, as your center becomes more mature, you will begin to attract large partners and donors who will be impressed with the professionalism of the audit.

Although an audit may be rigorous, it is worth the time and resources. It is another signal that your center has moved beyond the start-up phase and is beginning to become a mature community business.

5.1.2 Choosing an Auditor

Choosing an auditor is often the job of the board of directors or governors, so solicit suggestions from them. Some board members may have connections in the community that could provide an auditor at little to no cost. If you do not have any board members with suggestions on the process, charge one of them to undertake this task.

While there are many options to consider when choosing an auditor, make sure to consider these qualifications:

❑ Experience in the nonprofit sector. There are differences between for-profit and nonprofit accounting and the resulting interpretation of financial statements. Look for an auditor that has clients in the nonprofit sector since he or she will likely be more helpful and efficient. Experience with other community technology centers is a plus.

❑ Training in the General Accounting Office (GAO) standards. If you are required to have an audit for the federal government, make sure the auditor meets the GAO education requirements.

❑ References for the audit firm and the auditor. In addition to experience, you are looking for indications that the auditor has the technical expertise, communications skills and flexibility to conduct your audit. By establishing a good working relationship with an auditor, the process will be smooth.

❑ Fee. In the state where it is permitted, compare bids between audit firms. Fees can be a tricky measuring stick – some auditors offer a low rate for the first year, but raise those rates in subsequent years. Other auditors who do not have mush experience with nonprofits may take a long time to gather data and therefore will charge more.

❑ Variety. It may be beneficial to switch auditors every few years. After an extended period, auditors may know the organization so well, that it could be difficult to provide fresh insight.

5.1.3 Preparing for an Audit

To prepare for your audit, ask the auditor what information you will be required to provide. Many auditors prepare a list of those records that they will need to examine, forms that you will need to complete and questions you will need to answer. Complete, accurate and accessible records prepared in advance save the auditor time and the center money.

5.2 IRS Requirements for Nonprofits

Even though a Neighborhood Networks center may be considered a nonprofit entity, it still has responsibilities to the Internal Revenue Service.

5.2.1 Form 990

Form 990 is an Internal Revenue Service "information return" that must be filed every year by most nonprofits. Nearly all the information in the form is available to the public; increasingly, completed 990s are posted online.

Alternatives to and audit

If you feel your center may not be ready for a full audit, consider having a CPA perform a financial review. During the review, the auditor asks questions of center staff and conducts some analysis, but does not do as thorough of an undertaking as an audit.

The process does not yield as much information as a full audit, but may be less expensive. Check both your state's and your funders' requirements to see if a full audit is necessary.

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990 Myths

Nonprofits are not permitted to withhold from distribution the sections of the 990 that report compensation to employees and contractors. Removing that information when providing a 990 could result in the penalties that apply to willfully refusing to provide the 990 at all. The only section of the 990 that may be withheld is the part that identifies individual donors.

The IRS has required an annual information return from most tax-exempt organizations since the 1940s. The form requires these organizations to document continuing eligibility for exempt status and to provide detailed financial and program information. The form is available to the public. By reviewing completed forms, the public can use the information to help decide whether or not they wish to support the organization with donations. Various regulatory bodies also review nonprofits' completed forms to check their operations for compliance with applicable laws.

Copies of blank 990s and samples of completed ones can be downloaded in several formats from the IRS Web site at http://www.irs.gov/bus_info/eo/eo-tkit.html.

Since June 1999, every organizations that files a form 990 with the IRS has been required to make copies of its completed forms available immediately to anyone who makes a request in person. If the request is made by mail, the copy must be mailed within 30 days.

For more information regarding the 990 regulations, visit the Urban Institute's Web site at www.qual990.org

5.2.2 Unrelated Business Income Tax

All nonprofit organizations are subject to a tax on unrelated business income, which is income generated by a business activity that is not related to the direct purpose of the center.

This income tax usually does not apply to Neighborhood Networks centers, but it is worthwhile to investigate. For example, if a center purchases extra supplies for its own use, such as diskettes and printer ink cartridges, and sells these items to residents, this could be considered unrelated income. Even if the money is used to help fund the center, the IRS may consider it unrelated to the general business of the center.

If you believe that any of the income that your center generated can be classified as unrelated income, seek advice from an accountant, another Neighborhood Networks center or the Neighborhood Networks Information Center.

5.2.3 Nonprofit Risks and Compliance

Even as a nonprofit, your center encounters risks for which you must account. Risk is any uncertainty about the future that threatens to endanger your center's assets and limit your ability to provide for residents

and other center users. The IRS has categorized these risks for nonprofits, such as Neighborhood Networks centers:

❑ Injuries to residents, employees, volunteers or the public. These risks are unavoidable, but still may occur at your center. Make sure the center provides a safe environment for its users. If a person slips and falls, for instance, your center could be found negligent and therefore responsible for paying for any damages that the individual incurred. If you have properly maintained the center and prove that you were not at fault, the person who was injured will not be able to blame the center for the injury.

❑ Damage to property. This is a risk that centers must take. Vandals may damage the exterior of the center or the computers. A center must be prepared to deal with these risks and fix the damaged property.

❑ Legal 501(c)3 requirements. Nonprofit organizations are subject to specific laws and regulations. Centers must meet IRS requirements to maintain you're their tax-exempt status. The IRS can question your center's mission, bylaws and proper accounting of income and expenses. Violations can lead to fines, loss of tax-exempt status or possible dissolution. Other than the IRS, every state has laws governing 501(c)3 organizations. For more information on these requirements, see the National Association of Secretaries of State's Web site at http://www.nass.org.

Although nonprofits must conform to many rules and regulations, following the law is easy with proper center management. After the first year, it is important to review the basics of your center's operation – from equipment to bylaws.

First, make sure that the center has provided a safe environment. This will help alleviate the risk of injury to residents, employees, volunteers or visitors.

Second, make sure that the security of the center is sound. All computers should be fastened tables and the center should be locked after hours. If the property has a night guard, make sure the center is checked periodically.

Finally, re-evaluate your centers mission statement and bylaws. The IRS can find you in noncompliance if bylaws are not followed or the center is performing outside its mission statement. Change these two documents if necessary to present an accurate assessment of the center's work. Also, review the center's financial documents to insure proper accounting methods are followed. As mentioned previously in the section, an audit may be a good judge of your financial statements.

Although the IRS can be stringent when enforcing rules for nonprofits, a center easily can be in compliance by being aware of the laws and keeping the center up to date, both financially and physically.

5.3 Staffing Year Two

As the center grows, you may be able to invest in staff members to assist you with the day-to-day activities of running the organization. When thinking about hiring new staff members, keep the following in mind:

❑ Make sure new staff are utilized. Many center directors feel overwhelmed and feel as if they need help. If you are considering hiring someone to assist you, make sure you have duties for him or her to perform. It is frustrating for you and for your new hire to be idle.

❑ Check the budget. Oftentimes, center operations run more smoothly if a new person is brought on board. Use START to analyze if you can afford to staff.

❑ Recruit new staff. Many centers hire residents who have used the center successfully and gained marketable skills. Residents make great employees because they usually know many of the people in the center and they are dedicated to the organization. If you chose to hire someone not affiliated with the center, make sure you post a job description and interview all the eligible candidates.

If you are considering hiring new staff members, refer to Manual 1, Section 4 for general advice on recruiting and hiring staff and volunteers.

5.3.1 Attracting Candidates

Now that the Neighborhood Networks center is more than a year old, it is possible to leverage the successes of your operation and attract job candidates to your center. Recruiting those willing to work at your center can be easy by utilizing the multitude of resources available to both your center and the employees you are trying to attract:

❑ World Wide Web. The Web offers many sites for posting job descriptions and collecting resumes. Look at http://www.monster.com and http://www.hotjobs.com, among other sites, for more information.

❑ Newspapers. Local and regional publications have classified ads for those looking for work. Smaller ads are not expensive and are the tradition manner of attracting candidates.

Center staff job description

An easy way to recruit qualified staff is by having an accurate a job description. Here are a few hints to attract the best candidates:

❑ Be honest. Tell the candidate everything the job entails, including the hours and the workload. If you don't, and the person takes the job, then he or she may quit because of the unexpected responsibilities.

❑ Build their resume. In the job description, describe the skills the candidate will build while working at the center. Not many people will stay at a job for an extended amount of time and want to know how they will be able to better themselves their employment.

❑ Professional groups. Utilize your board of directors or governors to tap local professional groups. Many times, these groups attract people who desire to work for nonprofits.

❑ Networking. Again, use your board or center stakeholders and tell them of your desire to hire a new staff person. Ask them for suggestions for where to recruit candidates for the job.

Section 6: Assuring Successful Programs

Your center has been up and running for at least a year now. Programs have been designed and are being delivered. People are dropping by to use the services the center offers. You, the staff, and the center's board have worked hard to create a vibrant place for residents and community members to meet and learn. You know that some of your programs need improving and that you would like more people to visit the center. But, how can you assure that if you revise a program that it will attract the people you are trying to reach?   Also, how much revision is needed to the program and what should be changed? How exactly do you determine which program needs revamping?

Keep in mind that a center's programs are evolutionary. As the center grows and develops, programs that residents always enjoyed may become poorly attended. This doesn't mean that the center is no longer needed but rather that the users are ready for more advanced courses, a testament to the center's success. It could also mean that there has been a turnover in residents who wanted such courses and the new residents have different interests or needs. There are multiple reasons why programs may have loose their appeal, which is why the center must continually assess the programs it is delivering to its target population.

This requires knowing your residents, community, and neighborhood as well as the center's capabilities. One way to know if you are meeting needs is to measure program outcomes. This section will discuss program outcomes and give examples of ways in which you can determine if your center has a successful program or if a program needs revising.

In Year 2 and beyond, centers usually develop new programs that will keep their users excited about learning. For example, now may be the time to introduce a pre-school program or an e-commerce class. This section will give you ideas for new programs and suggestions for implementing and marketing the new courses you design.

Assuring successful programs is the heart of a Neighborhood Networks center's work. The community and neighborhood directly benefits when a center invigorates its residents with an excitement for learning and using today's technology.

6.1 Program Evaluation

In Section 3 on Networking, you evaluated the programs that you offered in the center's first year using START. Look at the evaluation form again:

6. Program Development	
1.	Initial programming designed based on feedback regarding resident and community needs; informal needs assessment and asset mapping process leading to programming decisions.
2.	center programs are structured and prioritized according to resident needs; active programs drives center orientation; increases breadth and diversity of programs.
3.	High level of resident utilization and satisfaction in center programming; center accurately assesses and revises programs as resident and community needs change; center has project and program ideas to develop in the next 3 years; programs tied to results in job growth, diplomas and other measurements.
4.	center focuses on reinventing itself -- changes and restructures program; program offerings may increase based on renewal of the mission and purpose of the center; center uses partners to deliver programs.
5.	Programs directly relate to the residents serving the outside community; center has at least 25% more/new programs than when it started; center addressing alternative ways of delivering programs (satellite centers, networking with other groups, internet distribution)

No matter what score you gave your center's performance over the course of the last year, it is crucial to strive for the goals identified in Number 3 and focus on the ideas offered in Number 4 and 5.

6.1.1 Center Evaluation

One way to evaluate the successes of programs is to measure their outcomes. A center offers many programs over the course of the year, but the most popular courses tend to revolve around building basic skills and job preparation and placement. Here are some examples of measurable outcomes for your center for Year 1:

❑ Number of interviews offered to residents (regardless of job offer)
❑ Number of jobs obtained by residents resulting from participation in programs
❑ Number of residents working on GED, ESL or other certification classes
❑ Number of children participating in programs
❑ Number of adults participating in programs
❑ Number of seniors participating in programs

As each center is unique, there are many more qualifications that can be listed as measurable outcomes. Make sure to measure outcomes of successful programs and those you wish to restructure. These outcomes are important to record as they show how well the center is performing.

Analyze the results of your evaluation:

- ❑ Where did the center perform well? Some programs excite and motivate residents more than others. If your center excelled at certain programs, try to understand why they worked so well. Think of these ideas as success stories for the second year of program development. Note why programs succeeded and how these standards may be able to be transferred to new and existing programs.

- ❑ Where did the center perform poorly? Every center has programs that are not as successful as anticipated, but they provide ideas for how to create and manage new programs or reinvent old ones. Note why these programs were not as successful as others and how this will change your outlook on the programs for Year 2 and beyond.

- ❑ What objectives were not measured? Centers should not try to create too many programs during the first year. Possibly, your center did not have any resident complete the GED program or secure a job interview. Perhaps children did not participate in the center's programs. Consider the programs might have attracted these residents or produces the desired outcomes. These ideas may fuel the creation of new programs in the future.

6.1.2 Course Evaluation

When you evaluate course offerings, consider the logistics of the programs. Why were some courses more successful than others? Here are some ideas why residents may have preferred courses:

- ❑ Course length. The course may have been too long or too short. Some residents see a course that runs for two hours and rule it out without considering it. Schedule. Some residents have busy schedules and can only use the center in the evenings or on weekends. Investigate and hypothesize if some courses were more popular because of the times they were offered.

6.1.3 Resident Evaluation

Not only should you evaluate the center's programs, but ask residents to do the same. This can be done formally, through a survey, or informally, by speaking with residents who frequent the center. Ask them the same questions about programs that were successful and programs that did not meet expectations. Make sure you understand why they think certain programs took off more than others because the popularity of programs

will impact whether residents use your center or not and that impacts the center's ability to meet its goals.

Also consider program influences. Some programs may have been marketed – promoted -- more than others. Consider the effect of highlighting programs and how this affected program attendance and success.

6.1.4 Community Evaluation

Finally, speak with community stakeholders as they are the indirect recipients of your programs:
- ❑ Local employers. Some programs prepare residents for employment. Speak with employers in the community and see if the center's programs have had a direct affect on their business or organization.
- ❑ Schools. Many schools are able to teach only limited computer skills. Some center programs build children's basic compute skills. By communicating with officials from the local schools, it is possible to see if these programs have been successful.
- ❑ Senior centers. Some center programs focus on building seniors computer skills. Talk with senior center staff (or an equivalent organization) to see if seniors have more computer skills.

Recording the results of the evaluation will help the center staff know what programs to focus on in the coming year.

6.2 New Program Development

By using the analysis of the previous subsection, it is possible to plan programs for the next year. Your analysis provides a method of strategic planning for program development. When you design programs for the coming year, remember to keep your evaluation in mind:
- ❑ Why did some courses perform better than others?
- ❑ What times of day were best for specific programs?
- ❑ What was the preferred length of time for each program?
- ❑ Which programs did the residents find the most useful?
- ❑ Which programs did employers or schools identify as the most successful?

6.2.1 Revamping Successful Programs

The easiest method of program development is to offer programs in Year 2 that were successful in Year 1. The most popular programs have the best chance of succeeding in the second year of the center.

Insure that there is enough of a resident base that would be interested in taking courses that have been offered already! Tap new residents or alter the course to attract different demographic groups.

6.2.2 Creating New Programs

Creating new programs for your residents after the first year the center opened its doors can be tricky. Residents are looking for the center to offer interesting programs and the center is looking to spread its program offerings to reach as many residents as possible. With the first year's experience behind you, it is possible to offer courses that seemed impossible when the center first opened.

Here is a list of suggested programs that a center can offer. This is similar to the list in Manual 1, but offers good suggestions for potential programs:

6.2.2.1 Public Access and/or Open Lab Time

Most centers will want to include some public access, or open lab time. This can be essential in marketing the specific programs to residents.
- ❑ Public access offers members of the community the opportunity to use computer and communications technologies to explore their own interests, develop skills and discover what computer technology can do.
- ❑ Open lab time provides those involved in structured classes with opportunities to practice their new skills or explore new ones.
- ❑ Some centers ask for a voluntary contribution of $1-$2 from participants to use an open lab. This modest fee can help defray operational costs, such as printer paper, diskettes and other center supplies.

Although open lab time is an essential part of any Neighborhood Networks center and does not require much in terms of program planning, it is important to keep in mind a few suggestions:
- ❑ It may be necessary to designate times specifically for children and other times for teens and adults.
- ❑ It is important to schedule times during the day and evening, according to resident survey responses.
- ❑ It is advisable to have introductory (or basic) programs for the most popular software. Remember that popularity shifts frequently so what is appropriate today can be obsolete tomorrow.
- ❑ Open lab time will normally be a heavy usage time. It is advisable to have a sufficient staff or volunteers present to provide

assistance or serve as traffic managers so everyone has the computer access they want.

❑ If public access is to include Internet access, more than one phone line or high-capacity access line may be needed. Special rules limiting one person's access time may need to be implemented.

6.2.2.2 Pre-school and Family Programs

Many centers serve properties with many young children. Pre-school and family programs help build the sense of community essential to any center and the housing development it serves. There are many programs a center can offer to work with families here are some ideas:

❑ Times when parents can bring young children and work together with them to explore appropriate software, such as drawing, animation and learning games.

❑ Opportunity to partner with a local Even Start, Head Start or day care program that may not have access to computers.

There are many important issues to consider about programs for young children and families:

❑ The attention span of young children is limited, so sessions should be short –- a half-hour or 45 minutes, at most.

❑ Young children may not be able to reach the computer keyboard or mouse from standard chair height. If you don't have adjustable chairs, stock booster seats or plenty of telephone books or similar items to heighten seating.

❑ Parents may need prior guidance in using the software to enable them to work efficiently with their children. Plan an introductory session solely with the parents.

6.2.2.3 After-school Activities

Many centers offer children the opportunity to come to the center after school by offering educational programs especially for them. Children see these programs as fun and exciting times away from the classroom. The secret is that while most children don't think they are doing school-related activities, they are gaining skills that will prove worthwhile in the future. Some children will enjoy:

❑ *Subject-area activities.* Commercial software that offers homework help, tutorials and other activities covering such subjects as reading, writing, math and sciences. See Section 2 for commercial software sites available to centers.

❑ *Games.* Games can be effective tools for getting children interested in learning more about computer technology. Be wary

of games, though. Too many espouse violence or are otherwise inappropriate.
- ❑ *Exploring the Internet.* Once children are equipped with basic computer skills, they may wish to test and improve their skills on the World Wide Web. This can be a research tool, communication method or skill-building program.
- ❑ *Multimedia publishing.* Children may become quickly skilled in designing Web pages, constructing family or neighborhood profiles and creating programs for school.

Allowing children to use the Neighborhood Networks center oftentimes requires patience and understanding. Many times, parents use the center as childcare. It is up to you to limit those types of activities at your discretion.

Here are other considerations when developing programs for children:
- ❑ Know every child. Enforce sign-in and sign-out procedures. Be sure you can notify an appropriate person if special circumstances arise.
- ❑ Make sure children know the rules of the center.
- ❑ Young people working alone need frequent attention. To facilitate peer tutoring and collaborative leadership, encourage two are more children to work together at a single computer.
- ❑ Kids need space, not just to use the computer, but to stow such items as their book bag and coat.

6.2.2.4 Adult Education

Establishing a comprehensive adult education program will involve far more than just computers at the Neighborhood Networks center. There will need to be classroom or tutorial space for non-computer-based learning and instructors with experience and qualifications needed to teach these classes. Rather than developing an adult education program from the ground up, partner with an existing program in the community. Potential partners are identified in this section. Also, see Section 7 regarding partnerships.

Adult Education generally includes:

- ❑ General Equivalency Diploma (GED) training. This program teaches specific academics that earn participants a diploma – equivalent to a high school diploma -- when they successfully pass a GED exam.
- ❑ English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. These programs teach people the basic skills to speak and understand English.

The class concludes with a test measuring a student's fluency in English.

❑ Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes. These classes enable residents to develop the ability to read, write and perform basic math. Learners progress to GED classes.

❑ Lifelong learning opportunities: Extension courses, Associate degrees and distance learning;

❑ Basic computer education. These workshops introduce participants to the keyboard and mouse, how to turn the machine on and off, and basic applications which enable the user to operate a computer, without supervision, and prepare them for advanced training.

Adults need to feel comfortable in the center. The thought of someone telling them what to do may be intimidating, so comfort with their surroundings is crucial. Here are some issues to consider:

❑ Many adults must bring their children with them to the center. The center should establish simultaneous classes for the children or a play area.

❑ Some adults prefer to learn among other adults rather than in a class integrated with children. If possible, set aside teaching time specifically for adult instruction.

❑ Many adults work; accommodate their schedules.

6.2.2.5 Senior Services

Often, family and friends no longer live nearby so many seniors feel isolated. Therefore, it is important to create programs and services that promote quality of life.
Seniors may enjoy:

❑ Mentoring younger people
❑ Games, such as chess or backgammon
❑ Telecommunications contact with relatives and friends through email and Internet phone
❑ Telecommunications and CD-ROM-based travel explorations
❑ Financial planning
❑ Family tree programs and family history presentations
❑ Information about health care and social services
❑ Just being part of the communications age

Seniors often prefer to learn about computers in classes made up of other seniors. Offering a "seniors only" session may spark interest in the center and make seniors more likely to return. Oftentimes, Neighborhood

Networks centers offer seniors programming during the day, when children attend school and most adults work.

There are seniors who enjoy being around young people. They make great volunteers and center operators should consider hiring them as part-time staff.

6.2.2.6 Career Development and Job Preparation

As with Adult Education, a comprehensive job preparation focus will entail additional, non-computer classroom space and instructors who have the experience and qualifications needed to conduct the classes. Job preparation generally includes both job skills training and job search activities.

Job skills training includes such classes as basic computer literacy, keyboarding skills, word processing, graphics applications, spreadsheets, databases and other office skills.

Job search activities include resume writing workshops; classes teaching interviewing skills, such as what questions to ask and what is likely to be asked; how to dress; workplace behavior training; and, how and where to look for a job.

The factor most likely to produce a successful job preparation program is the availability of real jobs to those residents who complete the program. If "job prep" is to be a focus of the Neighborhood Networks center, consider forming partnerships with local employers. See Section 7 for more details and a how-to guide.

There's no better motivation that the promise of a job after a resident successfully participates in a job readiness or technical program at a Neighborhood Networks center. A successful technique proven to be particularly motivating in engaging adults in job preparation courses is to present them with opportunities for employment after successful completion of the course or program.

6.2.2.8 Electronic Commerce

Electronic commerce is a term used to describe a variety of business and entrepreneurial activities that can be conducted at a Neighborhood Networks center using the resources. Residents can set up a "home office" of sorts in the center by using the center's computer, printer and fax machine to support their own business. Different varieties of "e-commerce" are described here:

Job Training Success Story

Barbara Moore, vice-president of resident relations with Royal American Management, Panama City, Fla., accessed federal funds through her local workforce investment board. Under the Workforce Investment Act of 2000, local boards distribute U.S. Department of Labor job training funds. Centers can access these funds by contacting their local board and becoming an approved Workforce Investment Act eligible training provider.

Moore was proactive in contacting the workforce development board. She wrote a letter that described the property's Neighborhood Networks centers and their activities and services and later made a formal presentation to the board.

"The presentations helped convince the board members that we have a strong program that supports our mission of enhancing the self-sufficiency, employability and economic self-reliance of the families living at Edgewood [Gardens Apartments]," said Moore. The Edgewood Gardens Neighborhood Networks center received $152,000 to implement their job training and placement programs.

- *Outsourcing* is an activity in which the center, or a group of residents, is hired by an organization or business to undertake a task it usually performs itself, such as payroll processing, data processing and inventory. For a fee, the center might perform tasks for local businesses, government agencies, community-based organizations and schools, thereby employing residents to do the work and earn income. The revenue produced through outsourcing is shared with the center.
- *Small business support* is an activity in which the center is made available to residents to support their business operations. For example, the center can provide access to computers for accounting, tracking inventory, billing and advertising.
- *Self-employment* involves residents who use the center to perform work for a fee, such as designing fax sheets, producing brochures, providing technical assistance to establish a computer system and creating homepages on the Internet. It is appropriate for the center to be compensated for use.
- *Entrepreneurship* is a business activity created by a resident using skills learned at the center.

E-commerce teaches residents computer skills and business skills, which can be a successful combination.

With the potential of revenue flowing into the Neighborhood Networks center, a few thoughts should be considered:
- The National Business Incubation Association offers suggestions for e-commerce for residents. Visit Web site http://www.nbia.org.
- The center is likely to need new or additional equipment and the latest software so residents can compete in the marketplace.
- Teenagers and young adults could work with the center to fulfill business contracts, learn business skills and develop relationships with the business community.
- Both the Neighborhood Networks center and residents can be income producing so the center should establish a method of sharing profits.

6.3 New Program Implementation

After analyzing the programs of your first year and deciding the programming schedule for Year 2, it is necessary to implement these new programs.

6.3.1 Program Marketing

One of the best ways to attract residents to a new program is effective marketing, or outreach. Since you designed programs to fit the needs and wants of residents, make sure they know about it. It is possible to publicize programs though a resident newsletter or with fliers distributed throughout the property. Handing them out by going door to door give you an opportunity to tell residents about the program and the center as well.

For advice on how to market your center with your current resources, see Manual 1, Section 5.

6.3.2 Program Staff

Now that you have succeeded in developing new programs for your center, it may be beneficial to hire new staff members to assist with the programming. If your center will offer a new adult job training program, it may be possible to hire someone to teach the class. If you have developed a new program for children, a new staff member may be a great asset.

For more information on hiring new staff, see Section 7.

6.4 Maintaining Programs

Now that your center has been serving the community for over one year, it may prove more difficult to maintain sustainable programs. Keep these points in mind when considering program sustainability:

❑ The programs should be aligned with the center's mission statement and goals. The mission of the organization is its overall purpose in the community is to serve the residents. During strategic planning, planners work from the mission to identify several overall, major goals that must be reached and that, in total, work toward the mission. Each program is associated with achieving one or more strategic goals and, therefore, should contribute directly toward the mission as well. If an idea for a program comes up at some time other than during the strategic planning process, center directors must carefully ask themselves if the program is really appropriate to the mission of the organization.

❑ The programs should be aligned with the center's strategic planning. Depending on the nature of the center, strategic planning typically includes review of the organization's vision, mission, values, overall issues and goals. Goals associated with services to residents often become programs and strategies to reach those goals often become methods of delivering services in the programs. Because programs

must be tied closely to the nature of the organization's mission and its goals, the program planning process should also be closely aligned to the organization's strategic planning process.

Typically, at a point right after the strategic planning process has identified strategic goals and issues, a team of planners can draft a framework for how strategic goals can be met. This framework is often the roadmap for a new program.

❑ Involve board members in program planning. Now that your center has matured, you can ask your board to take a more active role in maintaining programs. A major responsibility of board members is to set the strategic direction for their nonprofit. Therefore, board members should be highly involved in the strategic and program planning processes in the nonprofit. However, staff members might be strongly involved in determining how services will actually be delivered in the program.

❑ Involve the residents as much as possible. One can embark on a wonderful program planning process with all the right parts, but if key residents aren't involved to provide perspectives from the program user's point of view, the organization may build a beautiful ladder -- but on the wrong roof. Therefore, involve residents as much as possible in initial ideas for a program. Discuss with them your perceptions of their unmet needs. Try verifying if these needs actually exist and how they would like their needs to be met. You might have representatives from residents' groups review the final draft of your program plan.

❑ Note that this involvement of residents is a critical aspect of the marketing process, specifically marketing research. If residents are strong supporters of your programs, then you are on your way to sustainability.

❑ Don' worry about developing perfect program plan. If the center involves the right people, everyone participates wholeheartedly and continues to reflect on their experiences, then the center will develop programs that fit the needs of the residents. Residents become happier when they are able to participate in the program planning process and use those programs to build their skills. A strong first run of a class leads to a sustainable, long-term program for your Neighborhood Networks center.

Section 7: Partnership Development

Partnerships are relationships between two or more organizations where all parties agree to work together. This relationship will help each party to achieve mutual and individual goals. Partnerships can range from brief, casual relationships between two organizations for a one-time only event to multi-year agreements between organizations.

Most partners work one-on-one with Neighborhood Networks centers. Local partners can be businesses, corporations, schools, colleges, hospitals, social service agencies, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. By affiliation, partners can assist a center in identifying new opportunities to meet needs; open an avenue for involvement in a community and link to new markets; and assist in meeting the center's goals.

The Neighborhood Networks Initiative has developed national partnerships that have local affiliates all over the country.   Some national partners have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with HUD to meet certain criteria. Other national partners have a less formal relationship but still have programs that centers can access. They are listed in Section 7.2 after a sample MOU.

Recognizing that partners play many critical roles in the continued success of a Neighborhood Networks center, this section focuses on helping build effective partnerships. During the center's first year, partnerships were initiated. This section begins with a self-evaluation of existing partnerships in order to determine if your center is building a successful partnership program. Using the self-evaluation as a springboard, the section then discusses the importance of sustaining partnerships and creating new ones. It offers tips on being a good salesperson for your center in developing new partnerships. The section ends with a brief discussion on creating complex partnerships.

7.1 Partnership Evaluation

In Section 3, you evaluated existing partners and the status of your partnership development during the course of your center's first year. Look at the evaluation form again and consider the evaluation:

10. Partnerships	
1.	Beginning to look for community members for potential partnerships
2.	Two partners in the community that directly contribute to the centers goals and mission; alliance/joint venture with other community organizations (to join with to provide programs).
3.	Marketing the center and gaining more partners in the process; Beginning brand name identity.
4.	Active networking with other centers at a similar level of growth and development; sharing of ideas and approaches.
5.	Local or regional mentoring of other Neighborhood Networks centers or other similar social service organizations; center brand is established through Public Relations, publications and awards; the center has built a permanent tie with a corporate sponsor.

The self-evaluation that you gave your center is not as important as setting partnership goals for your second year of operations. Your center should strive to obtain level three of this evaluation, if not level four or five. One way to achieve your goals is to evaluate your partnership plan from the last year.

7.1.1 Partnership Evaluation

The best way to evaluate how well your center worked with other organizations in your community is to do a self-evaluation. It is important to note measurable outcomes. Think about the services that partners provided your center and the benefits to residents. Some of these outcomes may include the number of:
- ❑ Jobs created through partnerships.
- ❑ Shared programs created through partnerships.
- ❑ Residents who benefited from a partners' service.
- ❑ Community relationships built between the center and stakeholders.
- ❑ The various types of organizations with which the center is affiliated.

Since each center approaches partnership building differently, some of these outcomes may not apply to your center. Think of possible outcomes that your center has achieved in the past year and record them. It is important to think of a variety of outcomes because this is the best way to strategize new relationships and analyze existing ones.

Analyze the results of your evaluation:

❑ Which organizations made the best partners? Which partnerships didn't work out as well as planned? Some relationships work better than others and Neighborhood Networks partnerships are no different. Consider the success of these partnerships and determine the factors that caused the relationship to bloom or whither. Determine how much effort was involved from both the partner's and center's perspective. Understand how similar the organizations were at the beginning of the relationship. Try to note the reasons for success to transfer them to new partnerships.

❑ What objectives weren't measured? In the first year of operation, a center should not spread itself too thin by partnering with numerous organizations. Note which partnerships tended to be the most successful and which outcomes were measured the most. Any outcomes that the center did not achieve may lead to partnerships in the second year of operation.

❑ How did the residents benefit from the partnership? Some partners work directly with residents and some assist the center with organizational development and work indirectly with the residents. Analyze which category applies. If the residents do not have many interactions with partners, consider developing new relationships with organizations that directly benefit them.

7.1.2 Community Evaluation

It is important that the center be an active entity within the community. Speak with community members and existing partners to gain a perspective on how the center is relating to the needs of the residents.

Talk with partners and ask them to give you an honest evaluation of the partnership status. Some partners may expect more or less than you do and it is important to discuss these differences.

Seek out stakeholders and see if they noticed a sense of community within your center. One of the goals of partnerships is to develop a network of like organizations helping the same group of people. Ask those around the center to evaluate how well the center interacts with the community.

Record the results of the analysis. This process will help you identify partnership objectives for the next year and beyond.

7.2 Sustaining Successful Partnerships

In Year 2 of partnership development, it is most important to hold on to partners that benefit your center. These organizations are the ones that stuck with you and that means they've made a commitment to supporting the center.

If the partnership is proceeding well, consider renewing the relationship. This may involve contacting the organization and agreeing on an operating plan for the coming year, or better, redrafting and resigning a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) defining the relationship.

7.2.1 Redrafting a MOU

If a partnership is progressing well and both organizations wish to continue the relationship, the best method is to redraft and resign the MOU. A MOU should detail the goals and objectives of the existing partnership and specifically define the roles and responsibilities of each party.

MOUs are not a necessity, nor are they binding agreements. Some organizations may not want to enter into a MOU with your center. This is reasonable and does not weaken the relationship. Some organizations may worry about the commitment inferred in the MOU. Assure your new partner that the MOU is not legally binding – just an explanation on paper of the partnership. MOUs are preferred because the relationship is clearly defined in writing for both organizations and a good reference when clarification is needed.

<div align="center">

Memorandum of Understanding
Between
Your Organization
And
Partnering Organization
For Application To
specific program, if necessary

</div>

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishes a *type of partnership* between *your organization* and *partnering organization*.

MISSION

Brief description of your organization's mission. You might want to also include a sentence about the specific program if applicable.

Brief description of partnering organization's mission.

Together, the Parties enter into this Memorandum of Understanding to mutually promote *describe efforts that this partnership will promote e.g. health care or workforce development*. Accordingly, *your organization* and *partnering organization*, operating under this MOU agree as follows:

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Your organization and *partnering organization* – describe the intended results or effects that the organizations hope to achieve, and the area(s) that the specific activities will cover.
1. Why are the organizations forming a collaboration? Benefits for the organization?
2. Who is the target population?
3. How does the target population benefit?

Include issues of funding if necessary. For example, "Each organization of this MOU is responsible for its own expenses related to this MOU. There will/will not be an exchange of funds between the parties for tasks associated with this MOU."

RESPONSIBILITIES

Each party will appoint a person to serve as the official contact and coordinate the activities of each organization in carrying out this MOU. The initial appointees of each organization are:

List contact persons with address and telephone information

The organizations agree to the following tasks for this MOU:

Your organization will:

    List tasks of your organization as bullet points

Partnering organization will:

    List tasks of partnering organization as bullet points

Your organization and *partnering organization* will:

    List shared tasks as bullet points

TERMS OF UNDERSTANDING

The term of this MOU is for a period of *insert length* of MOU, usually 1-3 years from the effective date of this agreement and may be extended upon written mutual agreement. It shall be reviewed at least *insert how often, usually annually,* to ensure that it is fulfilling its purpose and to make any necessary revisions.

Either organization may terminate this MOU upon thirty (30) days written notice without penalties or liabilities.

AUTHORIZATION

The signing of this MOU is not a formal undertaking. It implies that the signatories will strive to reach, to the best of their ability, the objectives stated in the MOU.

On behalf of the organization I represent, I wish to sign this MOU and contribute to its further development.

Your organization:

_____

Name   *Date*
Title
Organization

Partnering Organization:

_____

Name   *Date*
Title
Organization

Neighborhood Networks National Partners

The Neighborhood Networks initiative has established relationships with numerous national organizations that local centers may be able to tap into:

American Association of Community Colleges – The American Association of Community Colleges is the national organization for two-year associate degree granting institutions. The association works with other higher education associations, the federal government, Congress, and other national associations that represent the public and private sectors to promote the goals of community colleges and higher education. Through the partnership, Neighborhood Networks centers gain access to training and resources from local junior colleges. http://www.aacc.nche.edu

The Bureau of Primary Health Care – The Bureau of Primary Health Care is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the Health Resources and Services Administration. The Bureau of Primary Health Care provides funding to more than 3,000 community health care centers across the country. Through the partnership, Neighborhood Networks center residents receive health care education on such topics as high blood pressure, diabetes and healthy living. Health care providers also provide physicals and other types of health care to residents. http://www.bphc.hrsa.gov

California State University System – California State University System has two service learning programs. One is a health-related community learning program funded through the Corporation for National Service, which provides information and services to underprivileged communities. The other is a governor-mandated service learning requirement for all public university and college students. Through the partnership, Neighborhood Networks centers have access to resources and student trainers made available through local colleges and universities in the California State University System. The partnership is available to Neighborhood Networks centers in California. http://www.calstate.edu

Centers of Excellence in Women's Health – Centers of Excellence were established by the Office on Women's Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1996. Currently, there are sixteen Centers of Excellence located at leading medical schools across the country. The centers integrate women's health services, research programs, public education and professional training, and forge links with health care services in the community. In Los Angeles, two

Neighborhood Networks centers that have local partnerships with the UCLA Center of Excellence receive informational health publications. http://www.4woman.gov/COE/index.htm

Digital Art Communities – Digital Art Communities is a national nonprofit organization that supports the Digital Arts Youth program. Through the partnership, youth can learn technical skills and develop digital imaging projects, Web pages, digital video and animation. Under the Digital Arts Youth program, kids at a Neighborhood Networks center in Miami sold t-shirts they had designed for community residents. Proceeds from the t-shirt sale were used to purchase hardware and software for the center. http://www.geocities.com/arttechycp/index.html

HOPE *worldwide* (HOPE) – HOPE *worldwide* is a national organization with about 40,000 volunteers. Through the partnership, HOPE volunteers educate Neighborhood Networks center residents on such topics as the state children's health insurance program, which provides health care access to children of low-income households, and childhood and adult immunizations. HOPE volunteers also distribute information about nutrition, lead poisoning, asthma and HIV/AIDS. Several Neighborhood Networks centers and HOPE subsidiaries from Baltimore, Maryland to Tacoma, Washington created long-term, local partnerships and sponsored health care events where HOPE volunteers conducted health seminars, provided health care information, and distributed food and clothing to residents. http://www.hopeww.org

The National Council on the Aging – The National Council on the Aging (NCOA) is an association of organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting the dignity, self determination, well-being and continuing contributions of older persons through leadership, service, education and advocacy. Through the partnership, residents of senior centers gain valuable computer skills and job training needed to re-enter today's workforce. In Philadelphia, nine senior clients of the NCOA have begun job-readiness training at a Neighborhood Networks center. http://www.ncoa.org

NCOA also provides access to the **Consumer Information Network,** which is a national network of 4,500 community organizations that helps inform older consumers and their families about key information on aging - primarily health information. Neighborhood Networks centers can register online for the Consumer Information Network to receive videos, pamphlets, and other information. http://www.ncoa.org/CIN/cin_intro.html

Technology For All – Technology For All is a national nonprofit organization that aims to bridge the digital divide by creating educational, economic and personal opportunities for underserved children, youth, and their families through access to technology and community relationships. Through this partnership, residents can obtain access to Microsoft Office Suite, SmartForce online educational courses and K-12 learning software. http://www.techforall.org

ThinkQuest – ThinkQuest is a program for students aged 12-19 that encourages the use of the Internet to create information rich Web-based educational tools and materials. Through the partnership, youth obtain valuable Web-design tools, win scholarships and awards, and are encouraged to participate in an annual competition. http://www.thinkquest.org

Youth Venture – Youth Venture is a national nonprofit that invests in young people as change makers by providing them the opportunity to create, lead, and launch their own organizations, clubs, or businesses that make a difference in their community. Through the partnership, youth between the ages of 12-20 are provided access to computer, software, and technical training to create youth-led computer-based initiatives. http://www.youthventure.org

Youth as Resources – Youth as Resources develops and funds through mini-grants youth-organized community service activities and programs. The partnership provides leadership training, mentoring, volunteers and curriculum to youth-serving organizations by assisting in the development of volunteer projects designed and implemented by young people between the ages of five and 21. http://www.yar.org

7.3 Creating New Partnerships

By analyzing the successes of partnerships, you may have discovered new organizations that could make a potential partner. This procedure is similar to the process in Manual 1, Section 7. Although the process is similar, it is important to highlight the key points of partnership development.

7.3.1 Identify Potential Partners

Using the analysis completed earlier in this section, identify which organizations you would like to target for the coming year. Make sure to go back to square one and remember these questions when starting partnerships:

□ *What are my center's goals?* Centers should regularly evaluate whether a partnership would help to achieve center goals. For example, a center goal may be to help residents learn computer skills so they find jobs with local employers. A partnership with a local community college to provide low-cost computer training could achieve this goal.

□ *What should we improve?* When centers identify places for improvement via assessment techniques, the centers should consider whether a partnership could help to make this improvement. For example, residents at a property would like to make improvements on a playing field on the property. By partnering with a local sporting goods company and a hardware store and recruiting local volunteers, a play area could be spruced up at little or no cost.

□ *What opportunities can we take advantage of?* Sometimes, another organization offers to partner with your center, or a foundation announces an initiative to donate computer software. Of course, consider partnering and think about more ways that your center can benefit from the relationship.

7.4 Starting the Partnership

Once you have identified which organizations would benefit residents, complete thorough research on the companies like you did in your first year of operation:
□ Newspaper articles
□ Annual reports
□ Web sites
□ Networking with center supporters and friends

Now that you know something about each one of your potential partners, it is time to identify the right individual to approach. Here are a few suggestions of how to select which partners may be most beneficial for the center:
□ Capacity. Can the potential partner really offer what your center hopes to achieve or did not achieve in Year 1? Does the organization provide the service that the center needs, but has too few staff to meet your demand?
□ Proximity. The distance between the partner's location and the center will likely influence the frequency of activities that occur in a partnership. Is the partner too far away? Does the partner not know the community that you serve because their organization is too far away? Does a potential partner provide similar services and is too close to your center to give healthy overlap of services to the community?

Be confident!

Remember that your center has already made an impact in the community. Although the process of partnering in the center's second year of operation is similar to that of the start-up period, be confident in contacting local organizations.

After one year, your center may be well known in the community. Use this clout to establish solid relationships with strong organizations.

- ❑ Level of effort. What is the level of effort that your Neighborhood Networks center will need to make to attract and sustain the interest of a potential partner? Will the level of effort that you put into maintaining the partnership reflect the quality or quantity of services that the residents receive?
- ❑ Reputation. Is the potential partner known to be receptive to partnership requests? Has the potential partner enjoyed financial success recently? Is the organization respected in the community? Does the organization have good business practices?

7.5 Be a Good Salesperson

Partnerships are two-way streets. For a center to receive something from a partnership, it must usually give something or help the partner accomplish its own goal. Not only is this a healthy relationship, but it makes the process of convincing others to partner with a Neighborhood Networks center easier and more successful.

Here are some ideas to express to potential partners why Neighborhood Networks centers make great community partners:

- ❑ Earn press. Organizations love positive press. Write a press release, invite local newspapers, television news crews or write an article about the success your center has found with working with partners.
- ❑ Fulfill an organization's mission. Many community-based organizations have missions that include community outreach and reaching the residents who use your center can fulfill this outreach. For corporations, corporate philanthropy can be a mission and your center could meet the corporation's eligibility requirements.
- ❑ Access to a specific population. The residents who use a Neighborhood Networks center may be the ideal target audience for an organization or business. You are providing them with a way to reach them. Create an active community. Some residents are very well informed and active in the community. This can be a selling point to businesses or organizations that may be interested in feedback, involvement or business from your community. Also, some organizations may be short-handed and will gladly exchange goods or services for volunteers from the center. For example, a League of Women's Voters might donate office supplies if residents help with a voter registration drive.
- ❑ Provide meeting space. Many community organizations simply don't have adequate space to hold meetings or activities. If your center has available space, offer it.
- ❑ Access to computers and Internet. In return for volunteers, goods or services from a partner organization, your center could offer the

organization's members or staff access to computers so they can surf the Web, do word processing, manage finances or join in computer classes ongoing at the center.

❑ Share staff. If the partner organization is short-handed and your center can handle it, it may be possible to share staff time or expertise. Make sure to offer the assistance of your center staff or volunteers if you are able to.

7.6 The Meeting

If a potential partner decides to meet with you – congratulations! Now you just have to convince them of the qualities of the Neighborhood Networks center. Similar to the initial phone call, during your meeting it is important to remember to speak informatively and sincerely:

❑ Make the request. Describe the activities your center would like to pursue and what goods or services the partner could provide.

❑ Give your pitch. Tell the prospective partner how his or her organization and the Neighborhood Networks center would benefit from the partnership.

❑ Promote your center. Many people actively listen to someone who is passionate about what they do. Be this person and convey the strength of your center through your convictions.

❑ Hit the hot buttons. Many organizations have topics of interest that hit close to home. When completing the research on your partner, make sure to identify these hot button topics and use them to your advantage.

❑ Establish credibility. Demonstrate to the partner how your center can deliver on the promises that you offer. Also, show how the partnership will increase the clout and reputation of both entities. Have examples and references ready.

❑ Be flexible. In any relationship, compromise is key. A partner may want to interact with your center in a way you did not consider. Be flexible and negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement.

7.7 Next Steps

Make sure to write a thank you note and send the potential partner more information. Again, this shows that you are committed to your center and have a sincere interest in the partnership.

Also, following up with the partner via phone will allow you to be proactive and successful. In the first phone call following the meeting, set up a

timeline and a "To Do" list. Regardless of the partner's willingness to work together, you will know when the partner must make a decision.

7.8 Beginning a New Relationship

Hopefully, after a few phone calls and information exchanges, you will have a new partner on board. The first step in this new relationship should be putting your arrangement in writing. This is the time when your center and the new partner should draft a MOU. For more information regarding MOUs, refer to Section 7.2.1.

7.9 Sustaining New Partnerships

Once the stage is set and you've decided to enter into a partnership, you're ready to finalize a formal agreement with your prospective partner. Here are some tips to keep in mind as you structure and maintain the partnership:

Bring benefits to all partners. Conduct ongoing assessments as to whether the partnership could be improved or modified to bring greater benefits to each partner.

Communicate. Ongoing communication with partners will help ensure that progress is made, help to overcome obstacles and ensure that no party is overlooked. This may be achieved by establishing regular meetings (for example, the third Tuesday of every month), regularly phoning the partner and carbon-copying (cc:) the partner on important letters and emails.

Establish one-to-one relationships. Get to know members of the partner organization. Effective working relationships are ultimately based on trust and mutual respect.

Actively involve residents and community members. Residents can attend partnership meetings or take part in a steering committee that guides the progress of the partnership. This will generate more interest and involvement in the partnership's activities and achievements. It also will act as an easy and inexpensive form of publicity when the partnership holds an event.

Hold joint activities. These can be anything from a celebration for the creation of a partnership to a long-term arrangement to provide a specific service. Try to involve all parties in the planning of these events and activities to create an overall sense of ownership.

Be patient. Great partnerships will take time to develop, and sometimes daring goals and achievements take longer than expected to earn. If things take longer than planned and all parties are doing their best to finish what needs to be done, be patient.

Keep momentum. A fine line exists between being patient and losing momentum. If regular progress is not made toward achieving goals, people and organizations can be disinterested in making the partnership work. And once momentum is lost, it can be very difficult to begin to make the process work again. In order to keep momentum, make sure that people at the center follow through on their promises to the partnership, and encourage others to do so as well.

Help each other. Showing support for your partner both with the partnership and outside the partnership can go a long way toward strengthening the relationship between two organizations. For example, mention your partner in promotional materials, thank your partner when the center receives awards and offer to help whenever possible.

7.10 Creating Complex Partnerships

Partnership development is a consistent process throughout the life of a Neighborhood Networks center. It involves researching organizations that would make great partners and seeing if the relationship between the two organizations would work.

See the text box entitled "Complex Partnership Success Stories."

Remember that as your center matures, so should its partnerships. Here are some suggestions for more elaborate partnerships:
- ❑ Create a multi-organization partnership. Sometimes collaborating with three or four organizations simultaneously provides your residents with unique and rewarding programs and services.
- ❑ Share programs and resources. If you develop a solid relationship with a partner, think about allowing them to use your computer lab free of charge if their organization will transport your residents to and from work. This is just an example, but more complex relationships can be established.
- ❑ Participate jointly in grants. Many large grants like to see many organizations representing the same community. Consider this while nurturing maturing relationships.

Complex Partnership Success Stories

When Pearl Hall began taking basic computer training at the Browns Woods Apartments Computer Learning Center in New Jersey, she hoped to develop computer skills that would complement her hobby of making plaques and greeting cards. She has since learned how to produce exceptional, graphically designed cards and plaques. She has also mastered Microsoft Word, Excel, Access and Powerpoint at the Neighborhood Networks center.

"For [senior citizens] to go into the computer world is really wonderful. Instead of sitting around, this is something to occupy our minds … you're never too old to learn," says Hall, who intends to continue her training on the Internet. "I feel as though I am able to reach out and help somebody else."

Hall received computer training through a program developed through a partnership between the Pemberton Township Senior Citizen Center, where she has been a member for more than two years, and the Browns Woods Computer Learning Center. In June, 37 seniors from the senior citizen center received certificates of completion in basic typing and computer training. Of the 37 graduates, nearly half went on to pursue advanced Microsoft Training.

The Neighborhood Networks center also recently developed a partnership with Southern Illinois University (SIU). For SIU students on site at McGuire Air Force Base in Carbondale NJ, an internship in adult education is a requirement for the Workforce Education and Development degree. Student Eddie Carr submitted the Browns Woods Apartments Computer Learning Center for internship credit approval last year and was excited when the program was accepted for internship credit.

Section 8: Raising Funds To Sustain Your Center

During the first year at your center, you may have worked with little funding and a limited budget. Regardless of the center's level of funding, residents were able to benefit from successful program offerings and partner services. Although your center was able to operate on the amount of money that came in over the course of the year, all Neighborhood Networks centers would like to raise more funds.

Funding becomes a key consideration if the center is to evolve and grow. If the center wants to increase its presence in the community and serve residents with the kinds of programs and services that help them move toward self-sufficiency, it will need additional funding. Knowing the center's fund raising abilities and its past successes is important before strategizing on ways to raise more funding. This section describes ways to evaluate the center's successes and potential for future fund raising.

Some centers may know their fund raising potential but need ideas on where and how to find additional funds. Section 8.2 describes new fundraising techniques and lists ideas for finding new funding opportunities.

The best way to maintain a relationship with funders is contact. From the initial thank you note to periodic updates, funders like to know that their money and resources are being put to good use. Ongoing communications, by phone or letter is important to the longevity of your partnership. Contact with funders will make reapplying for funding easier.

> **Grants, grants and more grants**
>
> On the most basic level of fund raising is grant writing. The process can be complicated and time consuming, requiring organization and patience. This process was covered in detail in the first manual in this series entitled Opening Doors: A Primer for Starting a Neighborhood Networks Center.
>
> Refer to this manual for information on planning and writing grants. This can be found at the Neighborhood Networks Web site at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org/.

8.1 Fundraising Evaluation

In Section 3, you evaluated the center's performance during the course of its first year. For this section, it is important to analyze and draw results from your evaluation of your fundraising abilities. Look at the evaluation criteria once more:

8. Funding	
1.	Limited resources/funding from owners/ property managers and HUD.
2.	Center mainly funded by HUD through residual receipts account, funds borrowed from the Reserve for Replacement account, excess income, rent increase, request for special rent adjustment or owner's equity.
3.	Budget growth; moving toward break even; in-kind contributions of resources and capital equipment; center beginning to receive additional funding from alternative sources – partners and allies, grants, early center alumni.

4.	center at break-even; more diverse portfolio of funders; active, well-managed process to address funding and other resource needs; using business plan as instrument to attract funding.
5.	Center achieves and maintains sustainability; great diversity of funders; consistent support from partners, allies, and other funding sources.

In the first year of operation, a center's fund raising success may be modest since programs and partnerships have not become mature and the center has just begun to make a name for itself in the community. Due to this, the self-evaluation that you gave your center should not reflect the effort you put into fundraising. In the years to come, you should strive to elevate the fund raising success of your center as indicated in this evaluation.

8.1.1 Center Fund Raising Evaluation

One of the ways to focus on improving fund raising success is to evaluate the first year of your center. It is unlikely that your center would be in existence if you had not had success in fund raising and it is important to note those outcomes.. It is also crucial to think of ways that your center may be able to diversify its funding streams and be able to fund operations and new programs. Ask yourself these questions when determining the outcomes of fund raising:
- ❑ Number of funding sources
- ❑ Number of large funders (those that generously supported the center)
- ❑ Number of funders from certain business sectors
- ❑ Number of funders from local, state and federal government sources
- ❑ Amount of funding received from the property owner
- ❑ Amount of paperwork required applying for or maintaining the funding.

Since every center has its own funding practice, it is important think of your own outcomes for the first year of fund raising. It is important to note the areas where you felt the center performed well, and those areas that may need improvement. By thinking of the variety and quality of funding streams, you will be able to improve your fund raising strategy and have more revenue to work with in this and subsequent years.

Analyze the results of your first year of fund raising:

- ❑ Where did your center perform well? Some centers draw much of their funding from one or two large organizations or government

entities. Other centers receive smaller grants and funding from multiple sources. Both are reasonable independently, but both are desirable together. Determine where your center falls and why you succeeded in those areas. The property that your center serves may have contributed a lot to the first year of the center. Also consider if this funding will be maintained through Year 2.

❑ What factors led to difficulties with funding? Funding a center in the first year is one of the most difficult tasks as a start-up organization. Understanding why your center was not as successful as you had hoped can help develop new funding strategies for the upcoming year.   Ask yourself if certain businesses or entities did not fund your center as your had expected. Determine if your center suffered from lack of credibility in the community and therefore had trouble obtaining funding.

❑ What funding sources weren't tried? Sometimes, centers do not have enough clout in the community to approach funders in their first year. Other times, centers do not know about government grants until the deadline has already passed. Determine from which sectors of the community the center did not attempt to draw funding. Identify these organizations and note them as potential funders for the next year.

8.1.1.1 Assess Capability to Attain Funding

After examining your first year of funding, it is important to examine the ability of the center to seek funding as well as its capacity to handle potential funding. In other words, does the center have the resources to prepare an application or launch, a fundraising campaign? And, secondly, does the organization have and can it demonstrate capacity to handle funding that may come as a result of its search?

Fundraising considerations include identifying who will write the proposal – can it be handled internally or is a collaborative option available and appropriate? Is there sufficient time? What kind of help is needed to put the package together and what costs might be associated with that?

Other issues that may arise are: How realistic is the fundraising plan? Can the center demonstrate its need? What makes the center "competitive", that is, visible and attractive to potential funders? What is the reputation of the member centers of the center and their performance with prior funding?

The answers to these questions will help the center to focus on those fund-raising efforts that are most likely to be successful.

Another part of this "funding" assessment is the financial impact of receiving funding. For example, does the center have or can it generate matching funds as may be required? If the center were to be funded, does it have the financial management strength and infrastructure to administer the monies in the manner it was intended? Further, is a system in place to produce the reporting generally required from funders and contributors?

Generating too much money and then not knowing how to manage it can be more detrimental to the center than receiving too little. The point is to not seek funds simply because they are there – make an informed decision.

8.1.2 Board Evaluation

A center's board of directors or governors is one of the best ways to learn about funders and use community connections to have a better chance at obtaining funding. Speak with your board as a group and individually. Ask the members of the board how they feel the center did in terms of funding. Speak to them specifically about:

❑ New areas to tap for funding in the coming year or funders to stick with in the long run
❑ The strength of the center in the community and its clout when applying for local funding
❑ The best way to secure federal, state or local government funding
❑ How to leverage the successes of the center when applying for grants

8.1.3 Stakeholder Evaluation

Over the course of your first year as a Neighborhood Networks center director, you have undoubtedly created relationships in your community. Many of these people care about the residents and the well being of the neighborhood and feel that the center is a community asset. It is important to speak with these people to gain an outsider's perspective and determine:

❑ The feelings in the community regarding the center and ideas for change to appeal to funders
❑ Resources or places to help seek funding

The results of these evaluations will help the center determine its fundraising objectives for the second year.

8.2 New Fundraising Techniques

The more the merrier!

When it comes to funding, it is crucial to remember to solicit as many funding sources as possible as some sources will tell you that funding is not available at the time of your request, you may not receive the full amount you requested or they may turn you down altogether. It is important to remember that there are usually many worthwhile organizations competing for the same funding.

The greater the number of sources, the greater the chance of fund raising success. This is one of the best ways to point your center towards sustainability.

The evaluation of the success of your center in its first year will determine how you approach your second-year fund raising strategy. There are two avenues to take when funding after year one. The first is to reinvest in old funders and hope that they will work with you again. The second strategy is to attempt to recruit new partners. Even though the method of obtaining funding will be the same, your center should have an idea of its strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, it should be easier to tap new sources of funding.

8.2.1 Revisiting Previous Funders

As the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." This quote is applicable to approaching funders that are previous supporters. There is a very good chance that if a center was successful in obtaining funding from an organization, government agency or company during the first year of operation, it will be successful again. Here are some suggestions about approaching existing funders and asking them for repeat support:

❑ Leverage your resources. Your center is now established in the community. It has a variety of partners, programs for residents and excellent community relations. Remind the partner that the center is stronger than the year before and that renewed support will enable the center to continue its successful contribution to the community.

❑ Think creatively. Some funders may have only been interested in the first year of the center's development. Now that the center is off and running and you present all of these success stories, it may be difficult to come up with a valid reason to give you more money. So, be inventive and think of new programs or services that require funding. Sometimes, trying to solicit money from through an established relationship may be just as difficult as attempting to start anew.

❑ Reapply for grants. Some funders require grantees to reapply for funds each year. Again, think of new ways to grow your center and tell the funders about these plans. Make sure to know the deadline of the application.

Does money = resources?

When speaking with previous funders or soliciting new partners, remember that an organization may give you an in-kind donation instead of an outright cash contribution. When speaking with any funding source, be certain to ask for both funding and resources and hope you receive both! Be prepared to make alternative suggestions if your first request is denied.

8.2.2 Applying for New Funding

Although your center was able to fund Year 1, it is never a bad thing to have too much funding. New sources of funding make this objective more of a reality, but also require more work. For most funders, it does not matter how many grants the center has applied for, you will still be required to complete and submit an application.

The most important thing to remember is that the center can never have too many funders. Although applying for a grant may be time consuming, focus on the goal of having money to implement a new program or purchase more equipment. In terms of fund raising, the potential for more funding is a great motivator when filling out grant applications.

8.2.2.1 Finding Funders

After the first year of operation, you have applied and received funding. It is now time to undertake the process again. Here are some reminders on clues for finding funding success:
- ❑ Know where to start:
  - ❑ Use the reference list in Section 2 to find good Internet resources and create a solid base from which you can begin.
  - ❑ It is effective to use targeted search engines on the Internet (such as those mentioned as resources in Section 2) and enter keywords such as "philanthropy," "grants," "fundraising" and "nonprofits." This should turn up some excellent electronic leads.
  - ❑ Tap local businesses and organizations for another good source of contributions. Most local entities want to contribute to the community – just convince them that they should do so via the Neighborhood Networks center.
  - ❑ Utilize the national Neighborhood Networks initiative. The Neighborhood Networks Web site lists a Weekly Funding Opportunity that is available to centers. Let others do a bit of research for you at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.
- ❑ Know what to ask for. Neighborhood Networks centers can solve many shortfalls in cash flow, equipment and staff by taking advantage of the many different resources available to nonprofit organizations.
  - ❑ Revenue. These resources include businesses and individuals. It may be wise to begin your search with those who have strong ties to the community since they are the most likely to donate to your center.
  - ❑ Volunteers. Those willing to work for free enable your center to conduct more training and offer more courses to your residents. Volunteers can also provide needed staffing for administrative duties and center programs.
  - ❑ In-kind donations. Centers can profit from in-kind donations or in-kind gifts. These are non-cash donations that can take the form of equipment, supplies, services and facilities.

8.2.2.2 Government Funding Resources

Funding your center with property funds.

Your center may apply to HUD for permission to use certain funds in tow requirements are met. First, the Neighborhood Networks business plan must receive approval from HUD. Secondly, HUD must approve any items that receive funding.

Potentially, you can draw money from the following sources:
- Residual Receipts Account
- Owner's equity
- Funds borrowed from the Reserve for Replacement Account
- Rent increase
- Requesting a special rent adjustment
- Excess income

Make sure to contact your local Neighborhood Networks coordinator regarding these funding ideas.

Resources can be obtained from federal, state and local governments. Neighborhood Networks centers have received funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Drug Elimination Grant and the Department of Labor's Welfare-to-Work grant, among many other sources.

State funding resources are obtained from entities like state job training agencies. Local funding resources are obtained from organizations that have a special interest in your community. An example of this is your local health department.

Although government funding can be competitive, Neighborhood Networks centers across the country have traditionally done very well.

Quick Guide: Government Funding Web Sites
Visit these Web sites for great federal, state and local funding leads:

http://www.firstgov.gov
http://www.fundsnetservices.com/gov01.htm
http://www.statelocal.gov/funding.html
www.hud.gov/fundopp.html
www.ieee.org/services/financial/grants/usgovern.html
www.sustainable.org/information/funding.html
www.cfda.gov/

8.2.2.3 Private Foundation and Corporate Funding Resources

Private foundation and corporate resources can be obtained from national and local foundations and corporations:

❑ National private foundations and corporations have no geographic limitations on their funding opportunities.

❑ Local private foundations and corporations usually only provide funding to organizations geographically located within their targeted areas – either where the entity is headquartered or places where the entity has offices or does business.

❑ Funding resources can also be obtained from community foundations. Community foundations are public charities not classified as private foundations. They receive money from the public and award grants to organizations within their community and/or surrounding area. Community foundations are easily recognized because they will most likely bear the name of the community they serve.

❑ Foundations and corporations often provide operating support, program and project support, and seed or reseed money. Other

Don't forget…

Besides foundation, corporations and government entities, don't forget to look to local businesses, individuals in the community and even your residents for funding. Residents especially may feel it is important for them to make some kind of contribution to the center because they are the recipients of its programs and services. Remember that not everyone will be a major contributor to the center but every little bit helps!

types of support may include technical assistance or training grants.

❑ The advantage of private foundation grants is that the money is required to be disbursed. The IRS requires private foundations to distribute five percent of their net worth. The money is there for them to give away.

❑ The advantage of corporate grants is that the application process is usually less demanding than that of a private foundation.

❑ The advantage of community foundation grants is that there is less competition since resources are available only in a specific geographic region.

Quick Guide: Private Foundation and Corporate Funding Resources
Visit these Web sites for great private funding leads:

http://www.nec.com/company/foundation/
http://www.nfie.org/grants.htm
http://www.att.com/foundation/
http://www.toshiba.com/about/taf.html
http://www.internet-prospector.org/found.html
http://www.intel.com/intel/community/grants.htm
http://aoltimewarnerfoundation.org/grants/grants.html
http://foundation.verizon.com/
http://www.allstate.com/foundation/
http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/grants/grants_fellowships.shtml
http://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/grantlist.asp
http://www.meaf.org/grants.html
http://www.philhardin.org/
http://www.nfie.org/
http://www.macfound.org/programs/
http://aoltimewarnerfoundation.org/grants/grants.html
http://foundation.verizon.com/

Section 9: Evaluating the Center for the Future

Now that another year has passed and your Neighborhood Networks center has made many accomplishments, it is important to record and analyze this information to make sure that your center will continue to thrive. Evaluating your past successes and accomplishes as well as recognizing your weakness is the most important place to start. Analyzing and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your center will help you plan for the years ahead. By understanding where you have been, you will be able to see ways to strengthen the center.

Organizations often go through stages of life cycles. For example, a new organization is in a start up cycle when it is putting into place new programs, hiring more staff, developing its first business plan, identifying new partners and donors, and writing its first grant. But, as the center evolves, it moves beyond start up into a growth cycle where it increases or expands its work. It increases its number of partners and donors, the type of courses it offers, and the number of residents who use the center.

Following the growth period, the center will enter into a sustainable cycle when it has effective partners; generous donors; strong, active resident participation; and measurable outcomes. While this cycle shows the center has matured and has many capabilities, it is also a time when some centers can become stagnant. Signs of stagnation are dependence on the same partners or donors; a tired, lackluster staff; and outdated programs. Centers in such a situation should take steps to reinvigorate themselves. Reinvigoration, or "reseeding", will breathe new life into your center.

This section discusses techniques to keep your center an exciting learning experience for participants, staff, the board, partners and donors. A center that continually self-evaluates and welcomes new challenges can be an invigorating place to work, learn and play. The following sections will help you with this process and to reseed for the future.

9.1 Evaluations Using START and Beyond

Entering into your second year, you should have established goals and objectives for all aspects of the center and recorded them in the Strategic Tracking And Reporting Tool (START). This tool also is excellent for evaluating your center at the end of year.

To revisit and analyze how well your center performed over the course of the year, visit the Neighborhood Networks Web site at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

A center should use START to evaluate the center, but more mature centers have other options available to them in addition to the Neighborhood Networks tool. Another way to evaluate activities is to monitor the implementation of the strategic plan (see Section 4 for information on working with a strategic plan). A method that will facilitate the implementation is assigning a completion date for each action mentioned on the strategic plan. Having deadlines is necessary to ensure a systematic and organized implementation of the strategic plan. However, during the implementation phase, the consortium may realize that some items or dates should be changed. It is important to note that the strategic plan is a living document and should be revisited, as needed.

Several online resources are available to consortium wanting to create an evaluation of their group or committees.
- ❑ Evaluation Activities in Organizations:
  http://www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/evaluatn.htm
- ❑ Organizational Assessments for Nonprofits:
  http://www.mapnp.org/library/org_eval/org_eval.htm
- ❑ Basic Guide to Program Evaluation:
  http://www.mapnp.org/library/evaluatn/fnl_eval.htm
- ❑ How-to Evaluate the Board of Directors:
  http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/03/09.html
- ❑ How-to Evaluate the Executive Director:
  http://www.nonprofits.org/npofaq/03/11.html
- ❑ Evaluation Resources:
  http://www.innonet.org/resources/eval_resources.cfm

9.2 Basic Steps of Evaluation

Regardless if you use other resources beyond START, there are four basic steps for a year-end evaluation: planning, determining data collection methods, collecting and analyzing data, and communicating the results. These four steps will help you evaluate your center in its second year and use these results to reseed and plan for the future.

9.2.1 Planning the Evaluation

Make sure to plan your evaluation ahead of time. If you have been recording your center's progress using START, then the process will be even easier. Make sure to have all of the data available at the beginning of the process.

Evaluators can be a team of center staff or volunteers, or an outside evaluator, such as a college student with specific experience in nonprofit evaluation methods. He or she should set the evaluation goals and develop questions that are important to a center. Make sure to work with the evaluator to and provide enough information to create a valuable report.

9.2.2 Determining Data Collection Methods

After deciding on the questions, it is necessary to decide what information is required to answer these questions and how to collect the pertinent information. Data collection methods include interviews, surveys, observations, focus groups and testing before and after the programs. These methods should be designed so they can be easily integrated into the center's daily operation.

9.2.3 Collect and Analyze Data

There are important points to keep in mind when working with data:
- ❑ Collect only relevant data that answers the questions presented.
- ❑ Revise collection strategies after primary analyses. Ask what data are still missing, what is working and what is not. A change in evaluation questions and initial data collection methods can lead to new interpretations and findings.
- ❑ Complex statistical analyses are not always necessary. Information on center activities can be summarized using simple methods, like percentage calculations and totals.

9.2.4 START the Evaluation

START is a great tool as it provides a ready-made method of evaluating your center on a scale of one to five. It is not necessary to use START, but the tool was designed for Neighborhood Networks centers specifically and is easy to use.

With the tool below, it is important to go through and answer these questions honestly. The evaluation tool will help you determine the strongest areas of your center, but by no means, does it provide a full evaluation. It is subjective and only used to begin the process of evaluation. Don't be discouraged if you do not receive the highest scores possible.

To view an interactive form, visit START at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Increase Resident Involvement

The collection of data can be made easier if the center's residents see it as an opportunity to improve current programs and establish new ones. Most people will look favorably upon the evaluation method if they know it will benefit them.

1. Resident Involvement

1.	Some residents involved in center planning and providing feedback on center program needs and center operational needs.
2.	Active resident involvement in center planning, programs and operations; Process and information gathering forms/tools to uncover resident program and center operational needs and resident satisfaction.
3.	Increasing resident satisfaction as through center feedback forms; center process to actively manage alignment between center usage, programs and resources.
4.	High resident/center user satisfaction as measured by customer feedback forms; high center utilization rates; residents volunteer in center for programs and center management.
5.	Broad, active resident involvement in volunteering, center management, programming and operations; outreach and center programs for unserved or under-served resident populations.

2. Community Involvement

1.	There is little involvement of the community beyond the center location.
2.	Growing community involvement in center's programs; The center is engaging the community in the planning process.
3.	Community is part of center's programs planning process; Community members are represented on the Center Advisory Board; Community involvement is consistent with program plans.
4.	Active volunteerism in center program and management; High and constant utilization of the center by different populations (learning and teaching from each other)
5.	A branch of center is established in the community or school.

3. Business Plan

1.	Used for HUD approval and to start the center
2.	Used as internal strategic planning and program operations-tracking tool
3.	Used as external marketing document to attract partners, allies and center funding.
4.	Used as a process to involve residents, stakeholders, and others in programming priorities, strategies, financial planning and fundraising.
5.	Used as a tool to evaluate center performance, learn continuous improvement , and innovate programs and outreach.

4. Evaluation

1.	Assess resident and community needs as well as readiness of sponsor support for the center; performance indicators in place.
2.	Rate quarterly performance and review progress against Business Plan and

	programming goals; tracking results/outcomes.
3.	Address program impact and results to show return on investment for partners and stakeholders publicize jobs, test score improvement, school achievement, health improvement, crime reduction, etc.
4.	Evaluating funding sources to strategically focus on sustaining the center; show ROI for partners and stakeholders.
5.	Re-assess center programs, customers, and center operations to re-focus on greatest needs.

5. Advisory Board	
1.	Limited site-specific membership on board; Used for planning and direction; Strong community leadership center.
2.	Active resident, property manager, and community organization and members; board-level center champions emerging.
3.	Board members who know how to access resources and build alliances; Board members with management experience to provide insight into the center's operation and management.
4.	Implementation of two advisory boards: resident programs and planning (operation vs. strategy); boards evaluate center performance and recommend actions on regular basis; board recruits new members with broad experience and skills based on center needs.
5.	Advisory Board re-evaluates and renews center programming and strategy; new board members who will provide innovative ideas, funding approaches and networks.

6. Program Development	
1.	Initial programming designed based on feedback regarding resident and community needs; informal needs assessment and asset mapping process leading to programming decisions.
2.	center programs are structured and prioritized according to resident needs; active programs drives center orientation; increases breadth and diversity of programs.
3.	High level of resident utilization and satisfaction in center programming; center accurately assesses and revises programs as resident and community needs change; center has project and program ideas to develop in the next 3 years; programs tied to results in job growth, diplomas and other measurements.
4.	center focuses on reinventing itself -- changes and restructures program; program offerings may increase based on renewal of the mission and purpose of the center; center uses partners to deliver programs.
5.	Programs directly relate to the residents serving the outside community; center has at least 25% more/new programs than when it started; center addressing alternative ways of delivering programs (satellite centers, networking with other groups, internet distribution)

7. Staffing

1.	center champion: person or small group of people with Neighborhood Networks vision for center preparation and launch.
2.	1-2 full-time employees; one-on-one volunteer program, which is delivered through a partner or by individuals in the community
3.	Staff expertise in management, program development, funding and partnership development; volunteer instructors with set curriculum; institutional relationships for volunteers; staff have specific job functions.
4.	Staff is reorganized; transfer of management responsibility from early champions to managers and administrators; center enhances its management team with new or advisory managers;
5.	Plans to minimize staff turnover and recruit new staff from partners, residents and community; emerging leaders from volunteers, partners, and current staff.

8. Funding

1.	Limited resources/funding from owners/ property managers and HUD.
2.	Center mainly funded by HUD through residual receipts account, funds borrowed from the Reserve for Replacement account, excess income, rent increase, request for special rent adjustment or owner's equity.
3.	Budget growth; moving toward break even; in-kind contributions of resources and capital equipment; center beginning to receive additional funding from alternative sources – partners and allies, grants, early center alumni.
4.	center at break-even; more diverse portfolio of funders; active, well-managed process to address funding and other resource needs; using business plan as instrument to attract funding.
5.	Center achieves and maintains sustainability; great diversity of funders; consistent support from partners, allies, and other funding sources.

9. Computers

1.	Equipment to meet basic program needs.
2.	Computers are proportional to use and programming needs.
3.	Access to the Internet; quality: computers within 18 months of new equipment on the market.
4.	Center replenishes its technology portfolio on a regular bases; equipment needs directly linked to programming and resident needs.
5.	Technology of the center meets advanced program needs; Computers are networked and Internet ready.

10. Partnerships

1.	Beginning to look for community members for potential partnerships

2.	2 partners in the community that directly contribute to the centers goals and mission; alliance/joint venture with other community organizations (to join with to provide programs).
3.	Marketing the center and gaining more partners in the process; Beginning brand name identity.
4.	Active networking with other centers at a similar level of growth and development; sharing of ideas and approaches.
5.	Local or regional mentoring of other Neighborhood Networks centers or other similar social service organizations; center brand is established through Public Relations, publications and awards; the center has built a permanent tie with a corporate sponsor.

After you have completed this evaluation and identified the strengths of your center, it might be wise to meet with center stakeholders, such as residents. Discuss the results and see if they agree with the accurateness of the evaluation. Also, brainstorm ideas on ways to improve the center. This evaluation forms the basis of Manual 2 by showing you how to focus energy entering the center's second year.

9.2.5 Communicate your Findings

Results are important to audiences seeking evidence of a program's success, so they should be reported effectively. Organize the text of your findings and identify it clearly, list items with "bullets" and use bar or pie charts to illustrate data that can be counted or measured. Qualitative, or anecdotal data, such as success stories describing a program, present wonderful mental pictures. Remember:
- ❑ Results of a small-scale evaluation cannot be broadly applied.
- ❑ There may be contributing factors that resulted in positive change. Acknowledge these other factors in the report, noting that the evaluated program is one of them.

These are just a few suggestions on how to communicate your results. Make sure to publicize and market the positive results of your center. See Section 3 for suggestions on how to tell others about your successes.

9.3 Post-Evaluation: What's Next for Your Center?

First, congratulations on completing at least your second evaluation of your Neighborhood Networks center!

By this point in the center's history, you have been able to set goals and accomplish many milestones. As you enter the third year of your center's operations make sure to constantly evaluate the direction of your center.

It is crucial to not lose the center's momentum. You have established yourself as a community leader and an asset to the residents. Make sure not to grow stagnant as a center, and look towards the future when developing and maintaining new relationships and programs.

If you have any more questions regarding your center's operations or the Neighborhood Networks initiative in general, call the Information Center at (888) 312-2743 or visit the Web site at http://www.neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Thank you for being such a strong member of the Neighborhood Networks community.